

***THE IMPACT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE ON  
THE WELLBEING OF EMPLOYEES IN THE  
PRIVATE SECTOR IN IRELAND***

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## ABSTRACT

Work-life balance is an important topic in both professional business practice and academic research. The literature shows that work-life balance is a central issue affecting wellbeing, as family and work are the most important elements of everyone's life. Any competing demands of work and family life cause conflict and negatively affect the wellbeing of workers. This study focused on assessing the impact of work-life balance determined by work-family conflict and family-work conflict on the wellbeing of individuals employed in the private sector in Ireland. Wellbeing was measured by levels of family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological distress.

Quantitative research methods were used for the study, and a sample population was chosen amongst participants who were single and in a relationship, female and male, with and without children, by using a convenient sampling method. The questionnaire used contained existing scales where the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were above the recommended 0.7. Out of 190 distributed questionnaires, 114 were completed and returned, giving an overall returning rate of 60%. The data was analysed using IBM SPSS version 20.

The study identified the existence of negative effects of poor WLB determined by high levels of work-family conflict and family-work conflict on family satisfaction. This study also confirmed negative effects of poor WLB due to high levels of work-family conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health. Negative impacts of family-work conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health were not supported. This study also showed that the main causes of work-family conflicts were excessive working hours and inflexibility of work schedule. It was recognised that employers can improve WLB by implementing family-friendly initiatives such as flexi-time, time off in lieu, compressed working week, childcare support and eldercare support.

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## **List of Abbreviations**

WLB: work-life balance

## **1. Introduction**

### ***1.1. Work-life balance overview***

Work-life balance is an important topic in both professional business practice and academic research. Work-life balance (WLB) has become a popular research area in different fields such as sociology (e.g. Allan, Loudoun & Peetz, 2007), psychology (e.g. Greenhaus, 2008; Frone, 2000), human resource management (e.g. Grady, McCarthy, Darcy & Kirrane, 2008; McDonald, Pini & Bradley, 2007), organization studies (e.g. Kelly, Kossek, Hammer, Durham, Bray, Chermack, Murphy & Kaskubar, 2008), and gender studies (e.g. Sullivan & Smithson, 2007; Hill, 2005; Sullivan & Lewis, 2001).

The majority of research on the correlation between work and family life refers to WLB and organisation policies, WLB and organisation culture, WLB and HR management, WLB and work commitment, WLB and absenteeism, WLB and gender equality, WLB and family life, and many more (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, Lockwood & Lambert, 2007). There are a number of studies examining WLB and workers wellbeing. These studies however were mainly conducted in the United States (e.g. Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), the United Kingdom (e.g. Wise, Bond & Meikle, 2003), Australia and New Zealand (e.g. Bochner, 2003). In addition, several researchers (e.g. Greenhaus, Collins & Shaw, 2003; and Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) noticed that work and family literature, while assessing relationships between work and family domains, considers family life as time spent with a spouse and children, ignoring other important aspects of family, such as time spent with parents, siblings and other relatives.

The literature indicates a number of WLB definitions. Clarke, Koch and Hill (2004, p.121) state that WLB is an “equilibrium or maintaining overall sense of harmony in life”. Clark (2000, p.751) describes WLB as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict”. The focus on the domains of work and family is vital as family and work are regarded as the most important elements of everyone’s life, and any competing demands from work and family life cause conflict and negatively affect the wellbeing of workers (Clark, 2000; Frone, 2000). Therefore, good WLB and wellbeing can be achieved when there is no role conflict, and when people are satisfied with their work and family roles (Clark, 2000). The literature shows that common consequences of poor WLB are depression and distress, leading to lower productivity, poorer work quality, higher absenteeism and staff turnover (Seligman, 2011; Hill, 2005).

Work-family research has generally been dominated by the study of family and work role interference. However, work and family role enhancement studies seem to be growing in recent years (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Work and family role interference suggests that responsibilities in separate domains such as work and family compete with each other in terms of limited time, psychological resources and physical energy, which leads to negative outcomes in both areas (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In contrast, work and family role enhancement suggests that participation in multiple roles can lead to better functioning in other life domains (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). This study focuses on work and family role interference, measured by work-family conflict and family-work conflict; however, study on work and family role enhancement is suggested for further research.

## ***1.2. Statement of research problem***

In recent years the Irish workforce has undergone immense change as a result of worldwide recession. Recent economic downturns and increased competition has put pressure on organisations to perform, and on employees to increase their productivity. Organisations deal with these tough economic times by cutting expenditure, decreasing staff levels and increasing workload for the remaining employees (O'Connell, Russell, Watson & Byrne, 2010). The wellbeing of workers who kept their employment can be negatively affected by job insecurity (Scherer, 2009). Many individuals feel under pressure to work longer hours to keep their jobs (Wayman, 2010), and to meet their family expenses (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This study recognises that the main causes of poor WLB amongst Irish employees are excessive working hours and a lack of work schedule flexibility.

The Irish labour force has experienced a significant increase in female workers and two-income households (Grady et al., 2008). Hilliard (2007) noticed that in the past three decades, Ireland experienced a significant increase in female workers staying in the paid workforce after getting married or returning to work after having children. Apart from an increasing female workforce Grady et al. (2008) state that the Irish labour force is aging, which means that in the future organisations would require greater flexibility in working arrangements. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) predicts that the old population in Ireland will rise significantly (CSO, 2013), which can lead to increased duties of care for dependant elders amongst Irish employees, and consequently to higher levels of work-family conflict (Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1992). This study recognises that

over 30% of employees required eldercare and childcare supports, but did not have these benefits available in their employment. These findings suggest that employers can improve WLB of their employees by providing such supports.

Despite a number of studies conducted on WLB and workers wellbeing in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand; there seems to be little research assessing the influence of WLB on the wellbeing of people working in Ireland. Also, studies conducted in the WLB area seem to focus on the female workforce (e.g. Bromet, Dew, Parkinson, Cohen & Schwartz, 1992), individuals with children (e.g. Frone, Russell & Cooper, 1997; Galinsky, Bond & Friedman, 1996) or single-parent families (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), rather than on all employees (Casper et al., 2007). In addition, Grzywacz and Marks (2000) recognised that many work and family studies refer to families in the traditional sense, meaning married heterosexual couples with children (Hilliard, 2007).

This study refers to ‘family’ in its traditional and non-traditional context, which includes married couples with children, as well as individuals of the opposite or the same sex, who are in partnered relationships, with or without children. Family in this study also refers to one’s overall home-life, which apart from partners, spouses and children, also includes parents, siblings, and other relatives. The main aim of this paper is to examine the effects of WLB on the wellbeing of employees in Ireland during hard economic times. Participants of this research were chosen amongst different employments in the private sector, and included male and female employees, single, in partnered relationships and married, with and without children.

The majority of research conducted on the effects of WLB on people's wellbeing has focused on work- family conflicts and their effects on individuals' wellbeing. Work-family conflict and family-work conflict occur when activities of these two domains interfere with each other (Breugh & Frye, 2007). These conflicts have been negatively associated with employees' family and work satisfaction (Breugh & Frye, 2007). There seems to be insufficient research conducted on family-work conflicts and their effects on individuals' wellbeing. This study aims to bridge this gap in literature and examine aspects related to family-work conflicts from a wellbeing perspective.

Both work-family conflict and family-work conflict were examined in this study in order to assess individuals WLB levels. Aspects such as family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological health (determined by levels of psychological distress) were examined in order to assess the participants' wellbeing. The following research question led this study:

*How work-life balance impacts the wellbeing of individuals employed in the private sector in Ireland?*

This paper confirms the existence of a negative impact of poor WLB determined by high levels of work-family conflict on family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological health. In addition, this study confirms the existence of a negative impact of WLB determined by high levels of family-work conflict on family satisfaction. However, negative impacts of family-work conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health were not supported.



### ***1.3. Structure of the study***

This paper is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter contains an overview of key literature on work and family domains, and indicates gaps in research on work-life balance and wellbeing. The main research problems, together with the rationale for the study have been presented in the introductory chapter, to show the reader why this research was worth studying. The research question and the main findings were also included in the introduction.

In the second chapter a literature review, definitions and theories relevant to the research topic are presented, to allow the reader to gain a deeper understanding of the main issues of WLB and wellbeing. This chapter also explains research variables, demographic and economic changes, and consequences of work-life balance and work-life imbalance for both individuals and organisations.

The third chapter explains the main research problems and the rationale for the research. The research question and six hypotheses developed for this study are also presented.

The fourth chapter discusses the research methods used in this study. The methodology chapter explains the reason for choosing quantitative research methods and techniques used to investigate relationships between research variables. In addition, this chapter describes sampling methods, characteristics of participants, bias, ethical consideration, data collection and the analysis process.

The fifth chapter contains the main results from descriptive and inferential statistics. This includes Cronbach's alpha coefficient for each scale used for this study, characteristics of the sample population, availability and use of WLB initiatives in the workplace, distribution of values, and results from six correlations.

The sixth chapter contains a discussion on each correlation result, and connects the findings outlined in the fifth chapter with the literature presented in the second chapter. The research question is also addressed. In addition, the discussion chapter details the practical implementation and limitations of the research.

The concluding chapter provides a summary of the main findings in relation to the hypotheses proposed for the study and the research question. Recommendations for further research are discussed in the eighth chapter.

## 2. Literature review

### *2.1. Work-life balance defined*

Work-life balance is vital for individuals' wellbeing, organisations' performance and a functioning society (Grady et al., 2008). There are different beliefs on how work-life balance should be defined, measured and researched (Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). Different terms are also used by different researchers while referring to 'work-life balance'. For example, Frone (2003), Greenhaus et al. (2003) and Clark (2000) refer to the term 'work-family balance'; Clarke et al. (2004) refer to 'work-family fit'; Burke (2000) refers to 'work-personal life balance'; and Grady et al. (2008) refer to 'work-life balance'. As work-family balance is often associated with traditional families, i.e., individuals who are married with children (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), and this study refers to a family in both its traditional and non-traditional form; in order to therefore avoid any confusion, the term 'work-life balance' is used throughout this paper.

Grady et al. (2008, p.3) state that the term 'work-life balance' is more comprehensive and includes "family, community, recreation and personal time". As stated by Grady et al. (2008) WLB in its broad sense captures all aspects of employees' personal and work life; this suggests that WLB should be focused on individuals, families, workplaces, communities, and society as a whole. However, due to word count and time limits, this study excluded community and societal aspects, and focused on individuals, families and workplaces.

The literature indicates a number of WLB definitions. For instance, Clark (2000, p.751) describes WLB as “satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home, with a minimum of role conflict”. Clarke et al. (2004, p.121) state that WLB is an “equilibrium or maintaining overall sense of harmony in life”. Greenhaus et al. (2003, p.511) define WLB as “the amount of time and the degree of satisfaction with the work and family role”. Frone (2003, p.145) presents a four-fold taxonomy of work-life balance, in which WLB is described as “low levels of inter-role conflict and high levels of inter-role facilitation”. Grzywacz and Carlson (2007, p.458) believe that WLB is an “accomplishment of role-related expectations that are negotiated and shared between an individual and his/her role-related partners in the work and family domains”.

Several theories have been proposed by researchers to explain WLB. Clark (2000) presented a border theory according to which family and work domains are separated by borders which could be physical, temporal or psychological. Some researchers (e.g. Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Lambert, 1990) referred to compensation theory according to which workers try to find more satisfaction in one domain to compensate for the lack of satisfaction in the other domain. Others (e.g. Rothbard & Dumas, 2006; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000) refer to spill-over theory according to which any feelings, emotions, attitudes and behaviours generated in one domain can be transferred or ‘spilled over’ into the other domain. Frone (2003) and Grzywacz and Marks (2000) proposed more conceptual models where WLB can be measured by work-family and family-work conflict as well as work-family and family-work enhancement. Grzywacz and Marks (2000) implemented Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model which

suggests that work-family experience is a joint function of process, individual, time and context characteristics, and does not restrict the experience to either negative or positive (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Clark (2000) explains that focus on the domains of work and family is essential, as family and work are the most important elements of everyone's life. Any competing demands of work and family life will cause conflict and negatively affect the wellbeing of workers (Clark, 2000; Frone, 2000). Clarke et al. (2004) and Clark (2000) agree that measurable aspects of WLB are satisfaction, lack of role conflict and an overall sense of harmony. Greenhaus et al. (2003) believe that balance between family and work domains also involves time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance. Frone (2003) states that the measurable four aspects of the balance between work and family roles are: (a) work-family conflict, (b) family-work conflict, (c) work-family enhancement, and (d) family-work enhancement. As these components have bi-directional effects on work and family domains, participation in the work role may interfere or enhance the performance in the family role, and vice versa, participation in the family role may interfere or enhance performance in the work role (Frone, 2003; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

Grzywacz and Marks (2000) recognised that work-family studies have been dominated by role strain and role enhancement perspectives. Role strain perspective of the work-family interface suggests that responsibilities in separate domains such as work and family compete with each other in terms of limited time, psychological resources and physical energy, which leads to negative

outcomes in both areas (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In contrast, enhancement perspective of the work-family interface states that participation in multiple roles can lead to better functioning in other life domains (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). This research focuses on interference between work and family. However, study on role enhancement between work and family is suggested for further research.

This study refers to the definition of WLB presented by Clark (2000), who believes that WLB is achieved when there is no role conflict, and when people are satisfied with their work and family roles. This definition seems to be the most relevant to this paper, as participants' wellbeing was measured using family and work satisfaction scales, and participants WLB was measured using work-family and family-work conflict scales. Clark (2000) explains that the focus on the domains of work and family is essential as family and work are the most important elements of everyone's life. Any competing demands of work and family life will cause conflict and negatively affect the wellbeing of workers (Frone, 2000; Clark, 2000). Clark (2000) in her border theory suggests that WLB is influenced by physical borders (e.g. workplace walls), temporal borders (e.g. working hours) and psychological borders (e.g. behaviour and thinking patterns) between work and family settings. People cross these borders and "make daily transitions between these two settings, often tailoring their focus, their goals, and their interpersonal style to fit the unique demands of each" (Clark, 2000, p.751).

Clark (2000) argues that keeping work and family lives separate enables the management of work and family borders; however integration of work and family lives eases transitions between those two domains. Each of these two approaches

can improve employees' well-being; this however is influenced by individuals' preferences in terms of separation or integration. Clark (2000) found that higher flexibility and lower permeability between work and family domains can result in lower work-family conflict. This again depends on individuals preferences regarding segmentation and integration. Research conducted by Hill, Hawkins and Miller (1996) shows that high integration of work and family domains can lead to negative consequences, as high flexibility can blur the boundaries between those two domains. Flexible, integrative work-family arrangements can improve WLB by enabling employees to spend more time with their family. At the same time, when these integrating arrangements are so high that they blur work-family boundaries, they can worsen WLB and lead to higher work-family conflict, higher dissatisfaction with work and family life, and higher levels of stress or depression (Clark, 2000; Hill et al, 1996).

## ***2.2. Work-life balance and economic changes***

The recent economic downturn, increased competition and evolving technology have put pressure on organisations to perform, and on employees to increase their productivity (O'Connell et al., 2010). Organisations deal with these tough economic times by cutting expenditure, decreasing staff levels and increasing workloads for remaining employees (O'Connell et al., 2010). The wellbeing of workers who kept their employment can be negatively affected by job insecurity (Scherer, 2009). Many individuals feel under pressure to work longer hours to keep their jobs (Wayman, 2010), and to meet their family expenses (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Higher demands on employees' duties and longer working hours reduce the time workers have to spend with their families (Hill, 2005). Statistics show that in Ireland in 2011 men worked an average of 39.4 hours a week and women 30.6 hours (CSO, 2012). Heavier work demands faced by employees also result in higher levels of stress, which negatively impacts workers' physical and psychological wellbeing (Malik, McKie, Beattie & Hogg, 2010). Grady et al. (2008) and Burke (2000) argue that organisations and managers need to understand the importance of WLB, its impact on employees' wellbeing, and the effects it has on organisations productivity and performance.

### ***2.3. Work-life balance and demographics***

Over the last few decades, global demographic changes such as an increased participation of women in the workforce, two-income households, single-parent families and eldercare have resulted in increased challenges faced by workers who tried to balance demands of work and family life (Tennant & Sperry, 2003; Young, 1999). These challenges and higher demands from work and family life have been found to have negative effects on the wellbeing of workers and their families (Hochschild, 1997), and resulted in family-work conflicts and work-family conflicts (Aryee, Srinivas & Tan, 2005).

The Irish labour force has experienced a significant increase in female workers and two-income households (Grady et al., 2008; Hilliard, 2007). According to CSO (2012) in 2011, 46.7% of those in Irish employment were women. Hilliard (2007) also noticed that in the past three decades, Ireland experienced a significant increase in female workers staying in the paid workforce after getting



married or returning to work after having children. This could be caused by changing attitudes of Irish people towards the traditional view of men being breadwinners and women being housewives looking after children (Hilliard, 2007).

Research shows that married women seem to work fewer hours than married men. Fine-Davis, Fagnani, Giovannini, Hojgaard and Clarke (2004) found that in Ireland fathers worked weekly 45 hours and mothers worked 32 hours. Recent statistics show that in 2011, 14.7% of married women worked 40 hours or more a week, compared with 44.5% of married men (CSO, 2012). Fine-Davis, McCarthy, Edge and O'Dwyer (2005) argue that men do not contribute as much time to household activities and childcare as women, hence WLB initiatives seem to be used more often by women than by men.

Apart from an increasing female workforce Grady et al. (2008) also state that the Irish labour force is aging, which means that in the future organisations would require greater flexibility in working arrangements. According to CSO (2013) projections the old population in Ireland (aged 65 years and over) is to rise significantly from 532,000 in 2011 to over 850,000 by 2026, and 1.4 million by 2046. The very old Irish population (aged 80 years and over) is to increase even more drastically, from 128,000 in 2011 to over 484,000 in 2046. These findings suggest that more employees may have to look after their elderly relatives, which will increase their duty of care for dependant elders, and lead to higher levels of work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

#### ***2.4. Broader dimensions of the term 'family'***

Barnett and Hyde (2001) note that many researchers indicate a difficulty in describing the various dimensions of the term 'family'. Traditional theories of a family refer to married heterosexual couples with children, where men engage in the world of work and women engage in domestic work and looking after children (Hilliard, 2007; Hymowitz & Weissman, 1990; Persons & Bales, 1955). This approach excludes gay or lesbian couples, or single-parent families (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). Grzywacz and Marks (2000, p.114) also suggest that many work-family studies limit their samples to individuals who are married or who have children, and argue that "such a limitation reflects too narrow a conceptualization of family", as single and childless individuals often carry significant family commitments to their parents, siblings and other kin, and therefore should be included in work-family studies.

Research has shown that employees with significant dependent care responsibilities such as care for dependant elders, care for young children, or employees with large families experience higher levels of work-family conflict than individuals without such care responsibilities (Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Grzywacz and Marks (2000) found that family support or burden influences levels of work-family conflict. Lower levels of family criticism and burden indicated lower work-family conflict amongst women, and lower levels of family support indicated higher negative spillover amongst both genders (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000).

Children were another factor recognised by Grzywacz and Marks (2000) reflecting on work-family conflict. Men with an oldest child aged less than 5 experienced higher levels of positive work to family spillover as compared to men who did not have children. However, both women and men who had children at any age indicated higher family-work conflict than those who did not have children (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Grzywacz and Marks (2000) also recognised marital status as a factor influencing work-family conflict. Their study shows that unmarried women and men experienced lower levels of work-family conflict than women and men who were married.

This study refers to ‘family’ in its traditional and non-traditional context, which includes married couples with children, as well as individuals of the opposite or the same sex, who are in partnered relationships, with or without children. Family in this study also refers to one’s overall home-life, which apart from partners, spouses and children, also includes parents, siblings, and other relatives.

### ***2.5. Work-family conflict***

Work-family conflict occurs when work activities interfere with family activities, and in contrast, family-work conflict occurs when family activities interfere with work activities (Breugh & Frye, 2007; Hill, 2005). The literature indicates various definitions of work-family conflict and family-work conflict. Netemeyer, Boles and McMurrian (1996, p. 401) describe family-work conflict as “a form of inter role conflict in which general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities”, and work-family conflict as “a form of inter role conflict in which the general

demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities”.

Research has shown that work-family conflict and family-work conflict are a result of pressure created by incompatible work and family roles (Yang, 2005; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) argue that participation in the work domain is more difficult due to participation in the family domain, and vice versa. Greenhaus and Beutell (1985, p.77) define work-family and family-work conflicts as “a form of friction in which role pressures from work and family domains are mutually incompatible in some respects”. These conflicts occur bi-directionally, which means that a negative experience at work can affect employees’ family life, and vice versa (Wayne, Grzywacz, Carlson & Kacmar, 2007; Yang, 2005). This happens because work-family conflict is negatively related to family life satisfaction, whereas family-work conflict is connected to lower work satisfaction (Frone, 2003; Williams & Allinger, 1994).

According to Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) there are three types of work-family conflict and family-work conflict: (a) time-based conflict, (b) strain-based conflict, and (c) behaviour-based conflict. Time-based conflict arises where work-related activities or family-related activities compete with other activities (Yang, 2005). Strain-based conflict occurs when pressures and demands of one role conflict with the demands of the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). Behaviour-based conflict arises when behaviour expected in one role conflicts with that expected in the other role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Many scholars agree that work-family conflict and family-work conflict are negatively related to family life satisfaction and work satisfaction (e.g. Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002; Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996), and therefore are negatively related to WLB (Kalliath & Monroe, 2009). Some researchers indicate different causes and effects of work-family conflict and family-work conflict. These findings do not always reach the same conclusions. For example, Allan et al. (2007) found that an excessive workload has a stronger negative impact on work-family conflict than long working hours, whereas Major, Klein and Ehrhart (2002) found a positive relationship between excessive working hours and work-family conflict, resulting in decreased health and lower family functioning. Poelmans, O'Driscoll and Beham (2005) argue that long working hours, as well as work schedule inflexibility increase work-family conflict. Grzywacz and Marks (2000) recognised that work characteristics such as high work pressure, lack of support in the workplace and lower levels of decision latitude were the main causes of work-family conflict. In relation to working hours, Grzywacz and Marks (2000) recognised that those working less than 20 hours per week experienced less work-family conflict than individuals who worked 45 hours per week.

Literature shows the connection between work-family conflict and lower family function (Hill, 2005), lower family satisfaction (Bedeian, Burke & Moffett, 1989), lower work satisfaction (Hill, 2005), poor physical and psychological health (Hill, 2005; Frone et al., 1997), distress (Dikkers, Geurts, Dulk, Peper, Taris & Kompier, 2007), depression and alcohol abuse (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Employees experiencing higher levels of stress caused by work-family

conflict seem to be less satisfied with their jobs, less productive and less committed to the organisation (Frye & Breugh, 2004). In turn, employees with lower levels of work-family conflict experience higher levels of job satisfaction (Hill, 2005). Also, those individuals who spend more time with their families enjoy a higher quality of life (Greenhaus et al., 2003).

Despite thorough research of these two conflicts simultaneously, there seems to be insufficient research conducted exclusively on family-work conflict and its effects on individuals' wellbeing. The reason behind this could be the argument that work-family conflict occurs more frequently than family-work conflict (Frone, 2003). Consistent with previous research, a study by Grzywacz and Marks (2000) suggests that work factors are the main causes of work-family conflict, and family factors are the main causes of family-work conflict (Frone et al., 1992). However, Grzywacz and Marks (2000) recognised that pressure at work also played a significant role in family-work conflict, supporting an interrelationship between work stress and family stress (Frone, Yardley & Markel, 1997). Family-work conflict has been mainly linked to lower work performance and lower family satisfaction (Hill, 2005), lower levels of WLB (Kalliath & Monroe, 2009), higher job stress and turnover intentions (Netemeyer, Maxham & Pullig, 2005), anxiety and substance disorders (Frone, 2000) and increased stress (Hill, 2005).

## ***2.6. Consequences of work-life balance and work-life imbalance***

Various studies conducted in the United States and the United Kingdom show that one of the most common consequences of work-life imbalance is depression,

resulting in decreased productivity and higher absenteeism (Layous, Chancellor, Lyubomirsky, Wang & Doraiswamy, 2011; Seligman, 2011). Low WLB can also lead to employees experiencing low morale and higher absenteeism (Brought, O'Driscoll & Kalliath, 2005), and organisations experiencing higher staff turnover, lower productivity and poorer work quality (Seligman, 2011; Hill, 2005).

Research conducted by Malik et al. (2010) shows that unbalanced work-family life caused by increased work demands leads to higher levels of stress. Stress caused by higher demands from work results in family-work conflicts and work-family conflicts (Aryee et al., 2005). This has negative impacts not only on the wellbeing of workers but also on their families (Hochschild, 1997), as it increases anxiety of individuals at work and at home (Doby & Caplan, 1995), and leads to lower quality relationships with family members (e.g. spouse or children) (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). Increased work demands such as overtime and shift work may lead to work-family conflict, which can result in decreased satisfaction with work and with the employer (Paton, Jackson & Johnson, 2003). Therefore, work-related stress has a negative impact on employees, organisations, families and society (Brought & O'Driscoll, 2005; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002).

WLB policies have been found to reduce absenteeism and positively impact employees' job satisfaction, productivity and retention (Hill, 2005; Allen, 2001). Grady et al. (2008) emphasise the importance for organisations to implement WLB initiatives. These initiatives include flexible working hours, temporal

agreements, childcare facilities, and supports such as counselling (Grady et al., 2008). Organisations providing such benefits seem to understand the relationship between greater WLB and retention of a competent workforce, and its effect on organisational commitment and profitability (Ryan & Kossek, 2008; Hill, 2005). Organisations with a high WLB culture are more likely to retain individuals who prioritise WLB (Kristof, 1996). In contrast, when WLB priorities differ between employers and employees, then work-family conflict occurs. This can result in staff deciding to leave an organisation and to look for work in organisations where WLB cultures are high (Kristof, 1996).

Research conducted by Clark (2000) found that workplace flexibility has a positive impact on employees' wellbeing and WLB. Employees with flexible work schedules achieve better WLB, which results in higher job satisfaction, higher home activity satisfaction, and lower role conflict (Clark, 2000). Clark (2001) believes that WLB has been recognised by employees and organisations as an important factor in achieving optimum wellbeing and job performance. In recent decades the focus on WLB has become significant due to changing demographics such as an increased female workforce, single parents and two-income households (Clark, 2001), as well as a restructured and aging labour force (Grady et al., 2008). As previously mentioned, Grady et al. (2008) recognised that the Irish labour force is aging, which means that in the future more individuals may carry a duty of care for dependant elders, and organisations may require greater flexibility in working arrangements.



## **2.7. Wellbeing**

Wellbeing is a crucial component of a happy, good-quality life (Diener, 2000). Wellbeing is associated with happiness, satisfaction, vitality, optimism, passion, and self-actualisation (Seligman, 2002). Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* states that eudaimonia (the Greek word for happiness) is the highest good for human beings and can be achieved by correct actions that lead to individual wellbeing (Myers, 1992). Corbin and Lindsey (1994, p.233) state that wellbeing is the utilisation of “an emotional, intellectual, physical, spiritual and social dimension that expands one’s potential to live and work effectively and to make a significant contribution to society”. Wellbeing can be assessed by individuals’ subjective judgement in relation to their life satisfaction, or psychological health (e.g. perceived stress) (Grzywacz, Almeida & McDonald, 2002); as well as by individuals’ objective measures of physical health (e.g. blood pressure) (Broadwell & Light, 1999). Research shows that wellbeing is strongly correlated with better mental health, better physical health and longevity (Strack, Argyle & Schwartz, 1991).

Wellbeing can be divided into: (a) subjective wellbeing, focusing on positive effects and the absence of negative effects; and (b) psychological wellbeing, focusing on achieving individuals’ full potential (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This study considers wellbeing as subjective wellbeing, which can be also defined as emotional wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This decision was based on the argument that the term ‘well-being’ is often used rather than ‘subjective well-being’ in order to avoid “any suggestion that there is something arbitrary or unknowable about the concepts involved” (Diener, 2005, p.3).

Emotional wellbeing was explained by Aristippus in the fourth century BCE as experiencing bodily pleasure and avoiding suffering (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This pleasure-pain theory is used by Ryan and Deci (2001) who argue that wellbeing involves three components of happiness: (a) life satisfaction, (b) the presence of positive mood, and (c) the absence of negative mood. Diener (1984) also argues that satisfaction with life, positive affect and negative affect are the main factors indicating wellbeing. Therefore, it can be understood that well-being refers to positive and negative evaluations that people make about their lives, which includes “reflective cognitive evaluations, such as life satisfaction and work satisfaction, interest and engagement, and affective reactions to life events, such as joy and sadness” (Diener, 2005, p.2).

As family and work are the most important elements in everyone’s life (Clark, 2000), and satisfaction with those two domains affects people wellbeing and overall feelings about their lives (Diener, 2005), this study examines wellbeing using measures of family life satisfaction and work satisfaction. Also, because this study refers to wellbeing as emotional wellbeing, a psychological health scale was included for examination of participants’ wellbeing. The psychological health scale assesses levels of psychological distress amongst participants.

### ***2.8. Family satisfaction***

In order to describe family satisfaction it is important to note that some researchers use the term ‘family satisfaction’ (e.g. Hill, 2005) ‘home-life satisfaction’ (e.g. Clark & Farmer, 1998) or ‘life satisfaction’ (e.g. Diener, 2005; Shin & Johnson, 1987). According to Shin and Johnson (1987) life satisfaction

refers to a judgemental process where individuals evaluate their lives based on their own unique criteria. These criteria include health and successful relationships; however, they may be differently understood or weighted by individuals (Diener, Emmons, Larsen & Griffin, 1985). Clark and Farmer (1998) state that home-life satisfaction means achieving close relationship and personal happiness. This study refers to the term 'family satisfaction' where the word 'family' is not limited to children, spouses or partners only, but it also includes parents, siblings and other relatives. This terminology was used in order to distinguish participants' work lives from their family lives, in particular whilst completing the questionnaire. Also, this terminology was used to avoid confusion by the reader and participants, where for example 'life satisfaction' could be understood as satisfaction with family life and work life together.

Many studies recognise relationships between family and work satisfaction and people's wellbeing (e.g. Brough & O'Driscoll, 2005; Frone et al., 1992). However, there seems to be limited literature focusing exclusively on the family satisfaction aspect and its connection to employees' wellbeing. Hill (2005) argues that family satisfaction plays an important role in individuals' wellbeing, and can influence employees' work performance. This occurs because family and work lives are the most important domains in everyone's life (Clark, 2000), family and work satisfaction are positively related (Frone et al., 1992); hence higher levels of family satisfaction can lead to higher levels of work satisfaction, organisational commitment and improved productivity (Hill, 2005).

## ***2.9. Work satisfaction***

Many researchers indicate a strong positive correlation between work satisfaction and wellbeing (Hill, 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2003). Work satisfaction can be divided into affective work satisfaction based on individuals' overall feeling about their job as a whole; and cognitive work satisfaction based on individuals' logical evaluation of the job conditions (e.g. working hours, pay and pension plans), opportunities and outcomes (Spector, 1997; Moorman, 1993). According to Clark and Farmer (1998) work satisfaction refers to a sense of achievement and income stability. There are two sets of factors determining work satisfaction: (a) intrinsic factors such as education, job meaningfulness, job expectations and family demands; and (b) work-related factors such as job security, skill variety, role overload and conflict, and supervisor support (Paton et al., 2003).

This study refers to affective work satisfaction to mean work satisfaction, and measures work satisfaction using subjective emotional evaluations made by individuals (Frone et al., 1992), in order to determine whether individuals experience satisfaction from their work as a whole (Paton et al., 2003).

## ***2.10. Psychological health***

Psychological health is fundamental to people's well-being and can be defined as "a state of well-being in which the individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community" (World Health Organisation, 2005, p.18). Psychological health can be assessed by identifying

symptoms of anxiety, depression, social dysfunction, and feelings of incompetence and uncertainty (Goldberg, 1972).

The literature indicates correlations between psychological health and ability to lead a fulfilling life (Whaley, Morrison, Wall, Payne & Fritschi, 2005) by highlighting the relationship between work-family conflict and psychological distress (Allen et al., 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1992), and between work-family conflict and depression and anxiety (Allen et al., 2000). However, Frone et al. (1992) argue that the correlation between depression and family-work conflict is stronger over time than the correlation between depression and work-family conflict.

### ***2.11. Benefits of wellbeing***

Burke (2000) believes that organisations can gain a competitive advantage by promoting employee wellbeing. This can be achieved by concentrating on positive emotions such as happiness, optimism, work engagement and involvement, which are closely related to a company's performance (Luthans & Youssef, 2004). Research undertaken by Daley and Parfitt (1996) found that workplace wellbeing programs improve employees' psychological and physical wellbeing, and job satisfaction. It therefore follows that a lack of work flexibility and higher work demands can lead to employees' lower energy levels and greater fatigue (Allen et al., 2000), higher cholesterol levels, higher blood pressure and obesity (Greenhaus, Allen & Spector, 2006).

Research conducted by Spector, Cooper, Poelmans, Allen, O'Driscoll, Sanchez, Siu, Dewe, Hart and Lu (2004) also found that organisations which aim to reduce work-family conflict by introducing WLB initiatives can not only increase work satisfaction amongst employees, but also may improve their family life satisfaction, which results in greater wellbeing. In the end, a happy employee is a more productive employee, and happiness is affected by both work satisfaction and family life satisfaction (Spector et al., 2004; Moorman, 1993).

Grady et al. (2008) believe that organisations need to recognise the importance of employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction, as these factors are closely connected to staff motivation, commitment and retention, which impacts organisations' productivity and overall performance. Therefore, individuals' wellbeing benefits not only employees by way of higher job satisfaction and better health, but it also benefits employers by decreased absenteeism and turnover, increased motivation, productivity and performance (Grady et al., 2008; Burke, 2000).

### ***2.12. Family-friendly policies in Ireland***

In 1998 WLB initiatives were defined in a report from Ireland's Equality Agency in order to promote family-friendly policies and equal opportunities in the workplace (Fisher, 2000). The aim of implementing family-friendly policies was to benefit both employers and employees. Benefits to employers included the retention of skilled and experienced staff, improved productivity and motivation, and reduced absenteeism. Benefits to employees were: the opportunity for better balancing of work and family lives, sharing of family responsibilities between men and women, and greater equality of opportunity between men and women

(Fisher, 2000; Department of the Taoiseach, 1998). The following benefits were included in the family-friendly policies: part-time work, flexi-time, flexi-place/teleworking, job-sharing, work-sharing, term-time working, maternity leave, parental leave, adoptive leave, and force majeure leave (Fisher, 2000; Department of the Taoiseach, 1998).

Watson, Galway, O'Connell and Russell (2009) argue that apart from the variety of family-friendly policies mentioned above, some organisations in the private sector provide WLB initiatives that do not directly affect the number of hours worked. These initiatives include: employee counselling, provision of financial advisors, financial support in employee education and medical facilities. McCarthy (2008) also notes that teleworking is more common in the private sector, but it has been piloted in some public sector organisations too. The public sector seems to offer more WLB initiatives that directly affect a number of working hours. These include work-share, flexi-time, or time off in lieu (Watson et al., 2009). Despite the availability of a range of WLB initiatives across the public and private sector, McCarthy (2008) reports that employees tend to work longer than their contracted hours. In the private sector a weekly average of worked hours is 42, and in the public sector a weekly average of worked hours is 34.5. Individuals working in the public sector indicated higher levels of WLB satisfaction than those employed in the private sector (Watson et al., 2009; McCarthy, 2008). As this paper focuses on WLB in the private sector only, further research on WLB and wellbeing of employees in the public sector is recommended.

### ***2.13. Summary***

WLB is vital for individuals' wellbeing, organisations' performance and a functioning society (Grady et al., 2008). Family and work are the most important elements of everyone's life. Any competing demands of work and family life cause conflict and negatively affect the wellbeing of workers (Clark, 2000; Frone, 2000). Findings from the literature review show that conflicts caused by interference between work and family activities lead to lower family life satisfaction and work satisfaction (e.g. Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002), and are negatively related to WLB (Kalliath & Monroe, 2009). Therefore, good WLB and wellbeing can be achieved when there is no role conflict, and when people are satisfied with their work and family roles (Clark, 2000).

Grady et al. (2008) argue that apart from an increasing female workforce and two-income households, the Irish labour force is ageing. This could lead to higher demands for more flexible working arrangements for employees with eldercare and childcare responsibilities. The Central Statistics Office predicts that the old population in Ireland will rise significantly (CSO, 2013), which can lead to increased eldercare duties amongst Irish employees, and result in higher levels of work-family conflict and poor WLB (Frone et al., 1992).

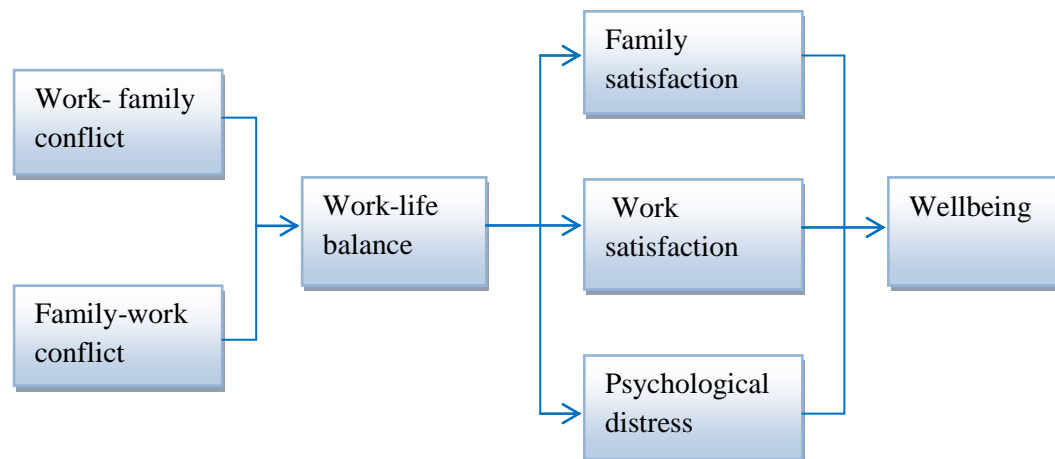
The literature shows that common consequences of poor WLB caused by high levels of work-family conflict are depression and distress, leading to lower productivity, poorer work quality, higher absenteeism and staff turnover (Seligman, 2011; Hill, 2005). Work-family conflict can also lead to lower family function (Hill, 2005), alcohol abuse (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000), and poor



physical and psychological health (Hill, 2005; Frone et al., 1997). Therefore, organisations and managers need to understand the importance of WLB, its impact on employees' wellbeing, and effects it has on organisations' productivity and performance (Grady et al., 2008; Burke, 2000).

### **3. Research problem and aim of the research**

After reviewing literature pertaining to work and family balance, the author found that work-family conflict and family-work conflict play important roles in affecting WLB and wellbeing of employees. The author decided to use those two conflicts as the two main variables measuring WLB, and three variables- family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological distress- to measure employees' wellbeing (see Figure 1). This study focuses on assessing how these variables relate to each other in order to establish the relationship between WLB and the wellbeing of individuals employed in the private sector in Ireland. Participants in this research were chosen from different organisations operating in the private sector in the Republic of Ireland, and included male and female, married, in relationships and single employees, with and without children.



**Figure 1: Research variables**

The literature indicates positive relationships between WLB and workers' wellbeing, and their outcomes affecting organisations performance. Moorman (1993, p.759) argues that “one of the most widely believed maxims of

management is that a happy worker is a productive worker". This research should benefit individuals and organisations in terms of a deeper understanding of the importance of a healthy balance between work and family demands and their effects on people's wellbeing and organisations' performance. From employees' perspective, a better understanding of the importance of balancing work and family demands should help in recognising the areas that negatively affect their wellbeing, and allow addressing these issues by seeking access to the family-friendly initiatives that would improve their work and family satisfaction and overall wellbeing. From an organisation's point of view, this paper should give managers better insights regarding connections between WLB and employees' wellbeing, and their impacts on employees' commitment, absenteeism, turnover, productivity and overall performance. This information may be useful to organisations in developing and implementing WLB policies.

The question that will be leading this study is:

*How work-life balance impacts the wellbeing of employees in the private sector in Ireland?*

The following six hypotheses were developed for this study:

Hypothesis 1

It is proposed that work-family conflict will be negatively correlated with family satisfaction.

#### Hypothesis 2

It is proposed that work-family conflict will be negatively correlated with work satisfaction.

#### Hypothesis 3

It is proposed that work-family conflict will be positively correlated with psychological distress.

#### Hypothesis 4

It is proposed that family-work conflict will be negatively correlated with family satisfaction.

#### Hypothesis 5

It is proposed that family-work conflict will be negatively correlated with work satisfaction.

#### Hypothesis 6

It is proposed that family-work conflict will be positively correlated with psychological distress.

## **4. Methodology**

### ***4.1. Research philosophy***

A research philosophy is a belief about how research should be conducted and how research reasoning (theory) and observations (data or information) are related to each other (Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2008). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2012, p.127) argue that research philosophy is related to “the development of knowledge and that nature of that knowledge”. According to Blumberg et al. (2008) there are two most distinguished research philosophies: positivism and interpretivism; and two main ways of thinking about research philosophy: ontology (concerned with nature of reality) and epistemology (concerned with acceptable knowledge).

From the ontological perspective positivists claim that there is only one reality which is objective and external to researchers. Conversely, interpretivists claim that reality is socially constructed and is subjective because every individual has their own sense of reality (Collis & Hussey, 2009). From the epistemological perspective positivists claim that only phenomena that can be observed and measured can be considered as knowledge, and a researcher remains distant and objective. Conversely, interpretivists claim that knowledge is developed from observation and interpretation of complex social constructions, of which a researcher is part of (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Blumberg et al., 2008).

#### ***4.2. Research approach***

After reviewing the literature related to WLB the author found that the positivism paradigm using a quantitative method seemed to be the most suitable approach for collecting data, and has been used by the majority of researchers (e.g. Allen, 2001; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996). Based on these findings, together with the author's own preference towards the positivism approach, quantitative measures were used for this research and data collection.

Positivism is a research philosophy which is adopted from the natural sciences. Positivists believe that "the world can be described by objective facts, which are then investigated" (Blumberg et al., 2008, p.22). The observable facts are objective as they are external. Because the social world exists externally it cannot be influenced, and research is conducted value-free. The author, as the researcher for this study, was independent and played the role of an objective analyst (Blumberg et al., 2008). Gill and Johnson (2010) argue that positivists demonstrate preferences towards collecting data about observable reality and looking for relationships in data, including bases of differences and regularities.

According to Saunders et al. (2012) quantitative research is associated with positivism using structured data collection methods, and deductive research approaches focusing on using data to test theory. The purpose of the literature review was to identify theory, which was treated by the author as a set of interrelated variables that could be measured and observed (Saunders et al., 2012; Collis & Hussey, 2009). The author collected data related to variables in order to provide empirical evidence. Theoretical framework was a base for formulating

hypotheses which were assessed against the collected empirical evidence (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Fisher, 2007).

Quantitative research conducted in this study was based on assessing relationships between variables which were numerically measured and analysed. Gill and Johnson (2010) argue that positivism researchers often use highly structured methodology to ensure replication. In order to enable generalisability, researchers can use probability sampling techniques which represent the population. However, probability sampling in this study was impossible due to a lack of access to the whole population of employees in the private sector. Saunders et al. (2012) argue that probability sampling is often not possible within business research as it requires a sampling frame, or may not be appropriate to answer a research question. Therefore different techniques of selecting samples, such as non-probability sampling, should be used.

#### ***4.3. Sampling***

The main purpose of sampling is to choose a subset of individuals from a population in order to estimate characteristics of the whole population (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Fisher, 2007). When choosing a quantitative research method such as questionnaires, using a sampling generates findings that are representative of the whole population (Saunders et al., 2012). In non-probability sampling techniques, generalisation is made about theory not about the population, therefore a sample size will depend on the study objectives and research questions (Saunders et al., 2012). Different methods of non-probability sampling can be

used. They include quota sampling, snowball sampling, purposive or convenience sampling (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Fisher, 2007).

A convenient sampling method was used for this research, which means that individuals who were easiest to include in the research were selected (Saunders et al., 2012; Fisher, 2007). In this case individuals including friends, colleagues, co-students, neighbours and other people that were known to the author or easy to approach by the author were selected and invited to participate in the study. Blumberg et al. (2008) and Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that even though convenience sampling is the easiest and the cheapest to conduct and can provide interesting data, it is the least reliable design due to a lack of ability to ensure precision, and due to limitations in relation to generalisability. However, convenience sampling can still be a useful technique as it is used to test ideas about a subject of interest (Blumberg et al., 2008). It should be noted that findings from this study are relevant to the sample population, and may not be relevant to the total population of employees in the private sector.

#### ***4.4. Participants***

Participants who were employed full-time and part-time were selected amongst different organisations operating in the private sector in Ireland. Those partaking were not limited to female employees with children only, as often occurs in WLB studies (Casper et al., 2007). Rather, the participants included male and female, married, in relationships and single employees, with and without children. The rationale behind this selection was the argument of Grzywacz and Marks (2000)



that single and childless employees also have significant commitments towards their families.

The sample of 114 participants was comprised of 73 female (64%) and 41 male (36%). The participants' age ranged from 18 to 66 years, with a mean age of 39.1 years. Of the 114 respondents, 42 stated that there were single (37%), 63 respondents were married or cohabiting (55%), 8 respondents were divorced or separated (7%), and 1 respondent was widowed (0.9%). Sixty three respondents did not have children (55%), and 51 respondents had children (45%). Amongst individuals with children, 8 respondents had 1 child, 26 had 2 children, 14 respondents had 3 children and 3 respondents had 4 children. Of the 114 participants, 11 indicated elderly care responsibilities and 101 indicated no elderly care responsibility. Ninety five participants were employed full-time (83%) and 18 respondents were employed part-time (16%). Participants employed full-time indicated that the number of hours spent in paid employment per week ranged from 37 to 65 hours, with a mean of 40.6 hours. Participants employed part-time indicated that the number of hours spent in paid employment per week varied from 14 to 36 hours, with a mean of 22.6 hours.

#### ***4.5. Research strategies***

Quantitative research can use experimental or survey research strategies. Survey research includes two main data collection methods: 1) structured interviews, and 2) self-completion questionnaires (on-line and paper questionnaires), where questions can be answered without a presence of an interviewer (Saunders et al., 2012; Collis & Hussey, 2009). In this study a survey research strategy was

chosen, and quantitative research was conducted through a self-completion questionnaire which contained five separate scales.

Saunders et al. (2012) stress the importance of the internal validity and reliability of a questionnaire, because a valid questionnaire allows collecting data that measures the investigated concepts; whereas a reliable questionnaire allows the data to be collected consistently. Mitchell (1996) argues that internal consistency of questionnaires includes correlating the responses to questions with each other. Cronbach's alpha is one of the methods measuring the consistency of responses to a set of questions (Mitchell, 1996). Hair, Black, Babin and Anderson (2010) suggest that for reliable responses in research the minimal internal consistency threshold of Cronbach's alpha 0.7 is required. Collis and Hussey (2009, p.204) state that "reliability is concerned with the findings of the research". However, even when a questionnaire is reliable, without an internal validity it will not be able to answer the research question (Saunders et al., 2012).

Validity is very important as it states whether the evidence presented justifies the claims of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Fisher, 2007). Saunders et al. (2012) argue that when assessing validity of a questionnaire the following should be considered:

- Internal validity or measurement validity, examining if a questionnaire measures what it should measure
- Content validity, examining if questions used in a questionnaire sufficiently cover the investigative subject

- Criterion-related validity or predictive validity, assessing the ability of the questions to make valid predictions
- Construct validity, assessing whether the measurement questions actually measure the construct being investigated

All scales used in the questionnaire in this study were carefully selected from a number of existing studies from several researchers, ensuring that their validity was already tested and that their Cronbach's alpha coefficient was above 0.7. Researchers whose scales met the criteria mentioned above and were selected for this study are: Netemeyer et al. (1996) with work-family and family-work conflict scales, Diener et al. (1985) with family satisfaction scale, Hackman and Oldham (1975) with work satisfaction scale, and Goldberg (1972) with psychological health scale. After deciding on the content of the questionnaire used for this research, Gmail Docs on-line survey tool was used to design and complete the questionnaire. Both on-line and paper copy questionnaires were used in this research.

#### ***4.6. Strengths and weaknesses of questionnaires***

A questionnaire is a term used to describe all methods of collecting data, where each individual is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a predetermined order (deVaus, 2002). Similar to other research methods, questionnaires contain some strengths and weaknesses which should be taken into consideration when analysing data. Saunders et al. (2012) argue that questionnaires are the most popular method of data collection in quantitative research, and are the most widely used within the survey strategy, as they enable a collection of responses from a large sample in an efficient way, at a relatively

low cost. As previously mentioned the questionnaire in this research took the form of on-line and paper copy, and questions were answered without the presence of the author. These forms of questionnaires allowed anonymity, which according to Rubin and Babbie (2010) encourages honest and genuine responses.

The main weaknesses of a questionnaire are the difficulty and time needed for its creation, along with ensuring its validity and reliability (Saunders et al., 2012). Bell (2010) believes that producing a good questionnaire is a difficult process, as researchers need to collect accurate data that answers research questions and enables them to achieve objectives. Also, high validity and reliability are necessary to minimise research error. All questionnaires used for this study were carefully selected by the author, ensuring that their validity and reliability were already tested. Saunders et al. (2012) argue that in order to be able to assess the validity and reliability of a questionnaire, and to ensure that the collected data answers the research question; a pilot testing should be conducted. As suggested by Saunders et al. (2012) a pilot study was conducted by the author before the main study commenced.

#### ***4.7. Pilot study***

A pilot study was conducted prior to distributing the questionnaire to the research sample. The aim of the pilot study was to refine the questionnaire in order to avoid problems in answering the questions by partakers in the main study, and to avoid problems in recording data (Saunders et al., 2012). The pilot study for this research was conducted amongst a small number of the author's friends and colleagues (10 individuals) in order to establish partakers' understanding of the

questions, any problems in answering, clarity of the instructions, attractiveness of the layout, and time needed to complete the questionnaire (Fink, 2009). Individuals taking part in the pilot study were asked to share their impressions of the questionnaire content and design, and also to provide their recommendations. This information was important in deciding on whether any amendments to the questionnaire were necessary. All the suggestions were considered, and as a result minor amendments to headings and layout of the survey were implemented. Also, as recommended by a number of individuals who took part in the pilot study, the following three open-ended questions were added at the end of the questionnaire:

1. How would you summarise your work-life balance?
2. What do you think your employer could do to improve your work-life balance?
3. Any other comments?

The reason behind adding these open questions was to allow participants to provide more extensive answers, and to disclose their attitudes towards their WLB. While analysing these questions, the author was able to obtain more insight on individuals' perceptions of their WLB, and their suggestions on how their employers could improve it.

#### ***4.8. The questionnaire***

This research was based on data collected from a self-report questionnaire made up of multiple questions. The questionnaire consists of five sections: 1) family-work conflict scale and 2) work-family conflict scale, which were used to measure participants' work-life balance; 3) family satisfaction scale, 4) work satisfaction scale and 5) psychological health scale, which were used to assess

participants' wellbeing. Individuals were also asked a variety of demographic questions, and were required to confirm the availability and the extent of use of the WLB initiatives in their organisations. The main objective of this research was to identify the key characteristics strongly related to the individuals' wellbeing in order to assess how WLB affects the wellbeing of participants.

The questionnaire used for this study included an information sheet explaining the reason for this research, emphasising confidentiality and anonymity of the survey, and the voluntary nature of participation. The information sheet clarified the meaning of a family as participants' life outside work; work-life balance as participants' level of satisfaction with their work and family life; and wellbeing as participants' happiness. Participants were advised that the completion of the questionnaire should take no longer than 15 minutes. This was confirmed during the pilot study conducted prior to the main research. The information sheet and the questionnaire are attached in the Appendix section at the end of this paper.

#### ***4.8.1. Availability and use of work- life balance benefits***

WLB benefits availability and their usage were measured using a nine point questionnaire developed by Allen (2001), and included questions such as availability and use of flexible time, compressed working week, telecommuting, part-time work, on-site childcare, subsidised local childcare, childcare information/referral services, paid maternity/paternity leave, and eldercare. Partakers were asked to specify which of those benefits are available to them and which have been or still are used by them. Gathered data allowed the obtaining of

information about availability and use of family friendly initiatives amongst various employers in the private sector in Ireland.

#### ***4.8.2. Family and work conflict scales***

Family-work conflict and work-family conflict were assessed using two separate scales: family-work conflict scale and work-family conflict scale. These scales were developed and validated by Netemeyer et al. (1996) and measure interferences between work and family lives of individuals. The family-work conflict scale has a coefficient alpha reliability of 0.86, and the work-family conflict scale has a coefficient alpha reliability of 0.88 (Netemeyer et al., 1996). In the current study the family-work conflict scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86, and the work-family conflict scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92.

In the family-work conflict questionnaire participants were asked the following questions: 1) The demands of my family or spouse/partner interfere with work-related activities, 2) I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home, 3) Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family or spouse/partner, 4) My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime, 5) Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties. Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants were asked to specify the degree to which they agree with these five items. Answers ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. High scores were indicative of high levels of family-work conflict.

In the work-family conflict questionnaire participants were asked the following questions: 1) The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life, 2) The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil my family responsibilities, 3) Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me, 4) My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties, 5) Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities. Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants were asked to specify the degree to which they agree with these five items. Answers ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. High scores were indicative of high levels of work-family conflict.

#### ***4.8.3. Family satisfaction scale***

Family satisfaction was assessed using a five-item life satisfaction scale developed and validated by Diener et al. (1985). In this questionnaire the word 'life' was replaced with the word 'family' as this research focuses on the participants' satisfaction levels with their family lives. This terminology was used in order to distinguish participants' work lives from their family lives, and to avoid participants' confusion where for example 'life satisfaction' could have been understood as satisfaction with family life and work life together. It was explained to participants that 'family' in this study referred to spouses, partners and children, as well as parents, siblings and other relatives. Cronbach's alpha for this family satisfaction scale is 0.81 (Diener et al., 1985). In the current study the family satisfaction scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.



Participants were asked the following questions: 1) In most ways my family-life is close to my ideal, 2) The conditions of my family-life are excellent, 3) I am satisfied with my family life, 4) So far I have got the important things I want in my family-life, 5) If I could live my family-life over, I would change almost nothing. Using a 7-point Likert scale, participants were asked to specify the degree to which they are satisfied with the five family satisfaction items. Answers ranged from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. High scores were indicative of high levels of family satisfaction.

#### ***4.8.4. Work satisfaction scale***

The individuals' level of job satisfaction was assessed using a three- item General Job Satisfaction subscale developed by Hackman and Oldham (1975). This subscale has a reliability coefficient of 0.86 and it is a part of the Job Diagnostic Survey (Hackman and Oldham, 1975). In the current study the work satisfaction scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

Participants were asked the following questions: 1) Generally speaking, I am very happy with my work, 2) I frequently think of leaving this job, 3) I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in my job. Using a 7-point Likert scale, partakers were asked to specify the degree to which they are satisfied with these three work satisfaction items. Answers range from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. High scores for item 1 and 3 showed a high level of job satisfaction, whereas item 2 was reversed scored and high scores indicated a low level of job satisfaction.

#### ***4.8.5. Psychological health scale***

Psychological health in this study was measured by levels of psychological distress. Individuals' distress was measured using a twelve-item General Health Questionnaire developed and validated by Goldberg (1972). The scale looks at the general mental health of individuals, which was defined by Whaley et al. (2005) as a state of wellbeing where people are able to lead a fulfilling life. The scale measures participants' wellbeing through assessing the appearance of distress. Internal consistency in a number of studies using Cronbach's alpha correlations has been reported as ranging from 0.77 to 0.93 (Goldberg & Williams, 1988). In the current study the psychological health scale achieved a Cronbach's alpha of 0.89.

Participants were asked the following questions: Have you: 1) been able to concentrate on what you are doing? 2) Lost much sleep over worry? 3) Felt you are playing a useful part in things? 4) Felt capable of making decisions about things? 5) Felt constantly under strain? 6) Felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties? 7) Been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities? 8) Been able to face up to your problems? 9) Been feeling unhappy or depressed? 10) Been losing confidence in yourself? 11) Been thinking of yourself as a worthless person? 12) Been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered? Using a 4-point Linkert scale, partakers were asked to identify severity for each of the twelve statements.

Questions 1, 3, 4, 7, 8, and 12 had answers ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 = better than usual, 2 = same as usual, 3 = worse than usual, 4 = much worse than usual.

Questions 2, 5, 6, 9, 10 and 11 had answers ranging from 1 to 4, where 1 = not at all, 2 = no more than usual, 3 = rather more than usual, 4 = much more than usual. High scores of the psychological health scale indicated high levels of distress, hence low levels of good psychological health (Hu, Steward-Brown, Twigg & Weich, 2007).

#### ***4.8.6. Demographic questions***

Participants were asked questions including their gender, age, and marital status, responsibility for the care of children, a number and age of their children, responsibility for the care of elderly relatives, number of hours per week spent in paid-employment, the sector they worked in, and their current role in the job. The last session of the questionnaire consisted of three open questions asking participants to summarise their work-life balance, suggest what they thought their employer could do to improve their work-life balance, and to make any additional comments. Demographic questions were asked in order to gain information about the participants and to understand the characteristics of the sample.

#### ***4.9. Ethical considerations***

All participants were advised that their participation was voluntary. Partakers were also assured that their own identity together with the name of the organisations they work for will remain confidential. It was explained to participants that the questionnaire is completely anonymous and does not include questions asking for any personal details, such as names of participants or names of employers. One question included in the demographic part of the questionnaire asked the employees to state what sector they worked in. Names of the

organisations that the author approached may only be revealed, if necessary, to examiners during the presentation of the thesis; other than this, information will not be revealed to anyone else, it will not be available to the public and will not be stated in this paper. Also, all participants were advised that they will be provided with a copy of the collected results on request.

#### ***4.10. Distribution methods***

There are several different distribution methods, each with different strengths, weaknesses and costs involved. They include distribution by post, by telephone, on-line, face-to-face, and individual or group distribution (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Fisher, 2007). In this study selected individuals were introduced to the survey by an information sheet, explaining the rationale behind the study and the questionnaire, sent via post or email, and also by explaining the study information and the questionnaire face to face, via Skype and over the phone. Individuals who were approached by the author face to face, via Skype or over the phone were asked for their preferences in relation to the questionnaire distribution and collection method (e.g. face to face, post or email).

The questionnaire was distributed in July 2013 amongst friends, colleagues, co-students, neighbours, and a variety of businesses around the author's work place and the author's home. Both on-line and paper copy questionnaires were used for distribution. A follow up procedure was implemented to increase the response rate (Saunders et al., 2012). Those who received a soft copy of the questionnaire were sent a reminding email after 7 days, and then after 14 days. Those who were approached face to face were reminded about the survey either via phone or face

to face after a week, and then after two weeks. All businesses were visited a second time after 7 days in order to establish how many questionnaires were completed, and to decide on the final collection date. A total of 190 questionnaires were distributed. A total of 114 completed questionnaires were collected. The overall resulting response rate was 60%.

#### ***4.11. Error and bias***

McNabb (2013) argues that two types of error can occur in survey methods. They are non-sampling error such as low response rates, and sampling error related to sample size. Both of these errors could have occurred in this study, and this should be considered during data analyses. A non-sampling error could have occurred due to low response rates. Out of 190 questionnaires distributed, 114 were returned, which gave a 60% response rate. McNabb (2013) states that a sampling error also called a random error decreases when a sample size increases. The size of the sample of this study was 114 participants, therefore sampling errors should be considered. Factors such as fatigue and distraction of participants while completing the questionnaire, different interpretation of questions, or existence of extraneous factors such as pay could have impacted the results, and this should also be considered in further analyses (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Non-probability sampling method was used for this research, which could increase the risk of bias due to a lack of systems ensuring that everyone in the population had an equal chance to be selected (McNabb, 2013). As a convenience sampling method was used for this paper, selection bias should be considered, as participants were selected amongst the individuals known to the author or who

were easy to be approached by the author, which means that it was impossible for each person in the population to have an equal chance to be chosen for the sample. Also, response bias should be considered, as characteristics of the individuals who volunteered to take part in the research could differ from the characteristics of individuals who did not wish to take part in the research (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge that even though convenience sampling can provide interesting data, it has limitations in relation to generalisability (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

#### ***4.12 Method of quantitative data analysis***

Data collected through the survey was quantitatively analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20. As previously stated the questionnaire for this study was designed using Gmail Docs tool. After completion of data collection, an Excel format file was downloaded from the Gmail Docs website. As recommended by Pallant (2013) data obtained from the questionnaire was transformed into a format that could be understood by IBM SPSS. This process involved allocating a numerical code to each response before transferring the file to IBM SPSS. After importing data to IBM SPSS, an errors check was conducted, and a code -1 was imputed through the discrete missing data option to indicate any missing values. Reversed-coded questions were recoded, and computing of total scale scores was completed in order to obtain total work-family conflict, total family-work conflict, total family satisfaction, total work satisfaction and total psychological distress.

## **5. Findings**

### ***5.1. Descriptive statistics***

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of WLB on the wellbeing of employees in the private sector in Ireland. Work-family conflict and family-work conflict were used as the two main variables measuring WLB, and three variables- family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological distress- to measure employees' wellbeing. Work-family conflict and family-work conflict scales measured levels of interference between work and family lives, and high scores were indicative of high levels of conflict. Family satisfaction scale and work satisfaction scale assessed levels of participants' satisfaction with their family lives and their work, and high scores were indicative of high levels of satisfaction. Psychological health scale measured appearance of distress, and high scores were indicative of high levels of participants' distress, therefore low levels of psychological health.

Six hypotheses were proposed and tested using correlation coefficients in order to examine associations between the variables. Prior to hypothesis testing, preliminary analyses were conducted in order to measure reliability of each variable, and to obtain the basic summary calculations in relation to the sample. These calculations included a mean and standard deviation for continuous variables, and frequencies for categorical variables. Descriptive statistics were also conducted to check for any violation of the assumptions underlying each test (Pallant, 2013).

The reason for conducting a reliability analysis for each variable was to assess the internal reliability of each scale for the sample used in this study. Hair et al. (2010) argue that Cronbach's alpha above 0.7 is considered acceptable, and Cronbach's alpha value above 0.8 is a preferable internal consistency. Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each scale in this study were above 0.8. The results are presented in Table 1.

Scale	Family work conflict	Work-family conflict	Family satisfaction	Work satisfaction	Psychological health
Cronbach's alpha	0.864	0.923	0.851	0.864	0.896

**Table 1: Cronbach's alpha of questionnaire scales**

### ***5.2. Characteristics of the sample population***

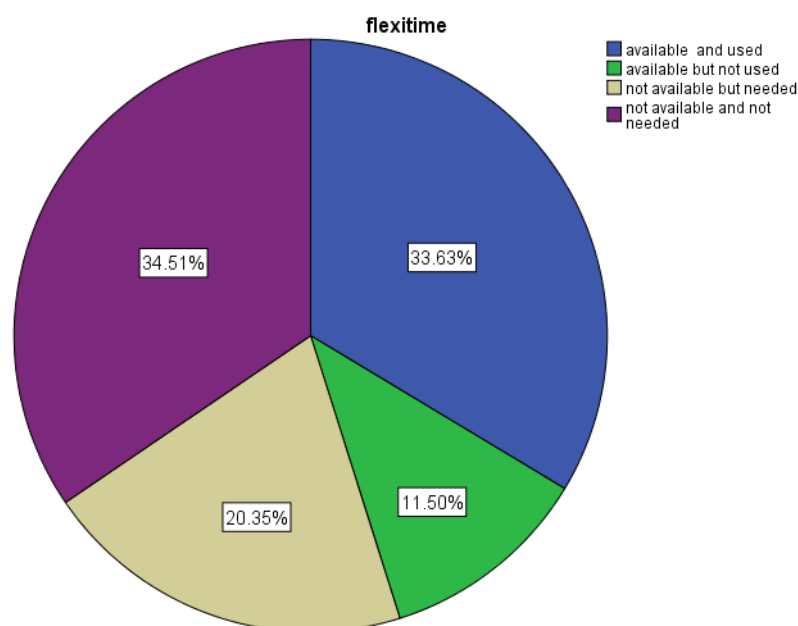
Descriptive statistics were conducted in order to obtain the characteristics of the sample population (Pallant, 2013). The sample of 114 participants was comprised of 73 female (64%) and 41 male (36%). The participants' age ranged from 18 to 66 years, with a mean age of 39.1 years. Forty two respondents stated that there were single (37%), 63 respondents were married or cohabiting (55%), 8 respondents were divorced or separated (7%), and 1 respondent was widowed (0.9%). Of the 114 participants, 63 did not have children (55%), and 51 had children (45%). Eleven respondents indicated elderly care responsibilities, 101 respondents indicated no elderly care responsibility. Ninety five respondents were employed full-time (83%), 18 respondents were employed part-time (16%). Participants employed full-time indicated that the number of hours spent in paid



employment per week ranged from 37 to 65 hours, with a mean of 40.6 hours. Participants employed part-time indicated that the number of hours spent in paid employment per week varied from 14 to 36 hours, with a mean of 22.6 hours. As previously stated, participants were from different employments in the private sector. The three main employment sectors in the sample population were financial sector (49%), retail sector (21%), and pharmacy sector (11%).

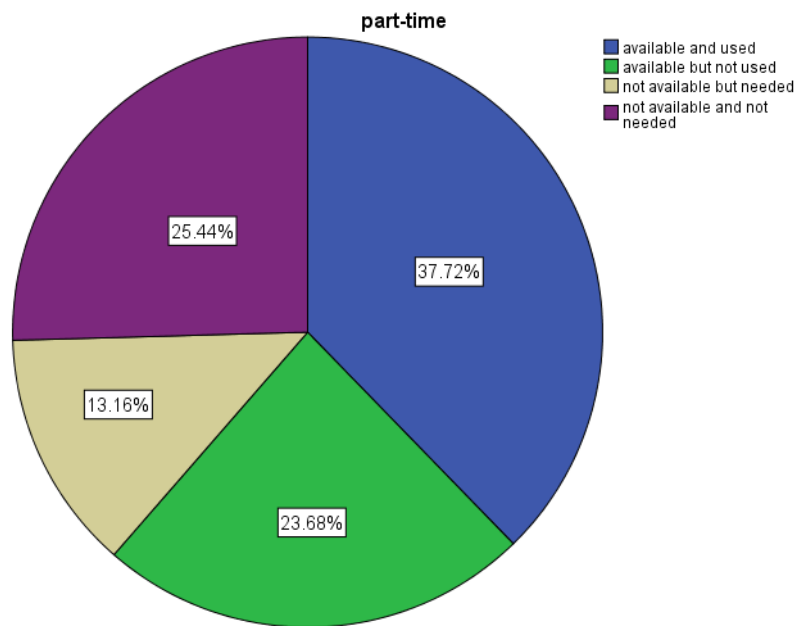
### 5.3. WLB initiatives in the workplace

In relation to flexi-time availability and use, 33% of participants stated that the initiative was available and used by them, 11% had this option available in their workplace but did not need it, 20% did not have it but needed it, and 34% did not have it and did not need it. The results are presented in Diagram1. Similar results were found in relation to compressed working week initiatives, where over 74% of employers did not provide such initiatives, and over 20% of the respondents stated that the initiatives were not available but needed by them.



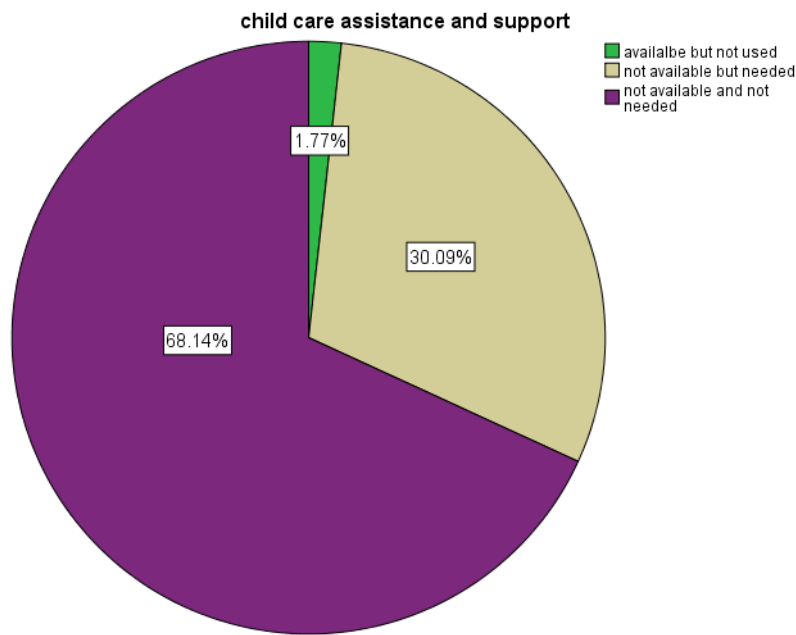
**Diagram 1: Pie chart of flexi-time work availability**

Part-time work initiatives were available and used by nearly 38% of respondents, nearly 24% of the sample had this option available in their workplace but did not need it, 13% did not have it but needed it, and 25% did not have it and did not need it. The results are presented in Diagram 2.



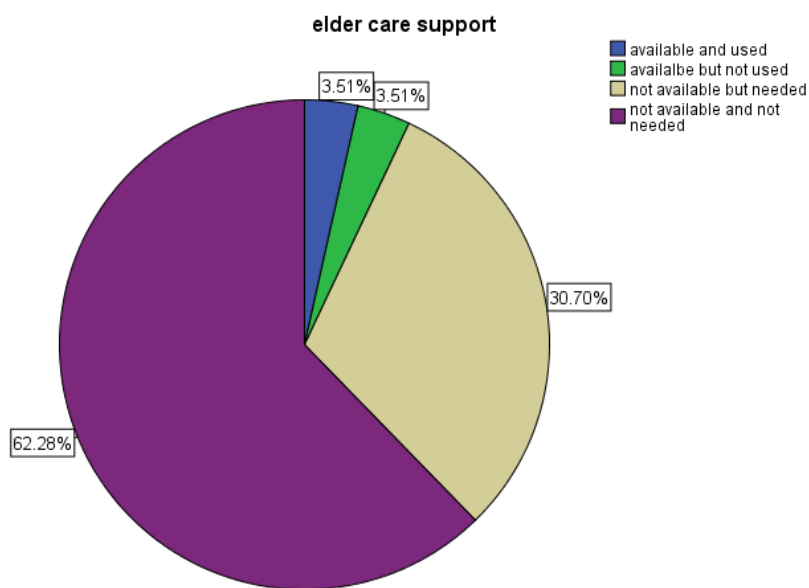
**Diagram 2: Pie chart of part-time work availability**

In relation to employers support and assistance towards childcare and eldercare, the vast majority of participants reported a lack of these initiatives in their workplaces. Ninety eight percent of respondents stated that they did not have childcare support and assistance available in their workplace; however 68% of the sample did not need such support (see Diagram 3).



**Diagram 3: Pie chart of childcare support availability**

Eldercare support was not available in the majority of respondents' workplaces (93%); however 62% of the participants did not need such support. Only 7% of the workplaces offered such support and 3.5% of the sample used this initiative (see Diagram 4).



**Diagram 4: Pie chart of eldercare support availability**

#### ***5.4. Distribution of values***

Descriptive statistics were calculated to assess the dispersion and central tendency of frequency distribution (Collis & Hussey, 2009). The mean of four variables (work-family conflict, family-work conflict, family satisfaction and work satisfaction) was measured using a scale ranging from 1 = very low to 7 = very high. Participants reported relatively high levels of work-family conflict with a mean = 3.52, which indicates that respondents experienced relatively high levels of work interference with family life. Moderate levels of family-work conflict were reported, with a mean = 2.62, which indicates that participants experienced moderate levels of family life interference with work. High levels of family satisfaction were reported, with a mean = 4.85, and relatively high levels of work satisfaction were indicated by participants, with a mean = 4.52. The psychological health scale assessed the appearance of distress, which was measured using a scale ranging from 1 = very high to 4 = very low. Participants indicated moderate levels of distress, with a mean = 2.01.

Descriptive statistics were also used to assess the normality of the distribution of scores for the total work-family conflict scale, total family-work conflict scale, total family satisfaction scale, total work satisfaction scale, and total psychological health scale. Skewness and kurtosis values provide information in relation to the normality of the distribution of scores on continuous variables (Pallant, 2013). Positive values for skewness in the total family-work conflict scale, total work-family conflict scale and total psychological health scale indicate that the data is skewed towards positive values (Collis & Hussey, 2009). This suggests that participants experienced higher levels of distress and work-

family and family-work conflicts. Negative values for skewness in the total family satisfaction scale and total work satisfaction scale indicate that data is skewed towards negative values (Collis & Hussey, 2009). This suggests that participants experienced lower levels of family and work satisfaction. Kline (2005) argues that the data is considered to be normally distributed when the skewness value is less than +3 or - 3.0. Therefore all five scales have acceptable statistics.

Negative values for kurtosis in the total work-family conflict scale, total family-work conflict scale, total family satisfaction scale and total work satisfaction scale indicate a relatively flat distribution, and a positive value for kurtosis in the psychological health scale indicate a somewhat clustered distribution. According to Kline (2005) the data is considered to be normally distributed when the kurtosis value is less than +10 or - 10. Therefore all the scales in this study have acceptable statistics. Descriptive statistics for all five scales are presented in Table 2.

Scale	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Total work - family conflict	3.52	7.87	.12	-1.18
Total family - work conflict	2.62	6.17	.71	-.38
Total family satisfaction	4.85	6.01	-.47	-.41
Total work satisfaction	4.52	4.86	-.49	-.98
Total psychological health	2.01	5.40	1.12	0.96

## 2: Descriptive statistics of questionnaire scales

### 5.5. Correlations

This part of inferential statistics focused on assessing how five variables, namely: work-family conflict, family-work conflict, work satisfaction, family satisfaction and psychological distress relate to each other in order to establish the relationship between WLB and the wellbeing of individuals. Six hypotheses were proposed for this study. After completion of preliminary analyses, Pearson's correlations were calculated to test the proposed hypotheses. Pallant (2013) suggests that correlations allow a researcher to assess the strength and direction of the relationships between continuous variables. Simple bivariate correlations were calculated on IBM SPSS to assess the strength of relationships between two variables, and to identify the direction of the relationships - either positive or

negative. Person product-moment correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) was used for calculations of correlations as it is designed for continuous variables (Pallant, 2013). It should be noted that correlations reach statistical significance when  $p < .05$  (Pallant, 2013), and the strength of the relationship is considered small when  $r = .10$  to  $.29$ ; medium when  $r = .30$  to  $.49$ ; and large when  $r = .50$  to  $1.0$  (Cohen, 1988). These indications were followed by the author during interpretations of the output from correlations.

Hypothesis 1 proposed that work-family conflict will be negatively correlated with family satisfaction. The relationship between work-family conflict (measured by work-family conflict scale) and family satisfaction (measured by family satisfaction scale) was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a statistically significant medium negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.44$ ,  $n = 111$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , which indicates that the more work-family conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their family lives. Therefore Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2 proposed that work-family conflict will be negatively correlated with work satisfaction. The relationship between work-family conflict (measured by work-family conflict scale) and work satisfaction (measured by work satisfaction scale) was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a statistically significant but small negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.28$ ,  $n = 113$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , which indicates that the more work-family conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their work. Therefore Hypothesis 2 was supported.

Hypothesis 3 proposed that work-family conflict will be positively correlated with psychological distress. The relationship between work-family conflict (measured by work-family conflict scale) and psychological distress (measured by psychological health scale) was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a statistically significant and medium positive correlation between the two variables,  $r = .40$ ,  $n = 113$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , which indicates that the more work-family conflict is experienced by individuals the more psychological distress will be observed. Therefore Hypothesis 3 was supported.

Hypothesis 4 proposed that family-work conflict will be negatively correlated with family satisfaction. The relationship between family-work conflict (measured by family-work conflict scale) and family satisfaction (measured by family satisfaction scale) was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a statistically significant but small negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.20$ ,  $n = 112$ ,  $p < 0.05$ , which indicates that the more family-work conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their family lives. Therefore Hypothesis 4 was supported.

Hypothesis 5 proposed that family-work conflict will be negatively correlated with work satisfaction. The relationship between family-work conflict (measured by family-work conflict scale) and work satisfaction (measured by work satisfaction scale) was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. There was a small negative correlation between the two variables,  $r = -.15$ ,  $n = 113$ , which would indicate that the more family-work conflict is



experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their work. However this correlation was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), therefore Hypothesis 5 was not supported.

Hypothesis 6 proposed that family-work conflict will be positively correlated with psychological distress. The relationship between family-work conflict (measured by family-work conflict scale) and psychological distress (measured by psychological health scale) was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient. However there was no statistically significant relationship between the family-work conflict and psychological distress,  $r = .03$ ,  $n = 113$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . Therefore Hypothesis 6 was not supported. Results of all correlations are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Person's product-moment correlations between all variables**

Scale	1	2	3	4	5
1. Total work-family conflict	--				
2. Total family-work conflict	-.48**	--			
3. Total family satisfaction	-.44**	-.20*	--		
4. Total work satisfaction	-.28**	-.15	.50**	--	
5. Total psychological distress	.40**	.03	-.54**	-.53**	--

\*  $p < 0.05$  (2-tailed)

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (2-tailed)

## **6. Discussion**

### ***6.1. Study objective***

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of WLB on the wellbeing of employees in the private sector in Ireland. Work-family conflict and family-work conflict were used as the two main variables measuring WLB. Three variables, namely: family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological distress were used to measure employees' wellbeing. This study focused on assessing how those variables related to each other in order to establish the relationship between WLB and the wellbeing of individuals. Six hypotheses were proposed and tested using correlation coefficients in order to examine associations between the variables.

### ***6.2. Work-family conflict***

Work-family conflict was the first variable defining individuals' WLB. Work and family literature indicates that work-family conflict occurs when work activities interfere with family activities. Netemeyer et al. (1996, p.401) described work-family conflict as "a form of inter role conflict in which the general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the job interfere with performing family-related responsibilities". The present study proposed that work-family conflict will be negatively related to family satisfaction and work satisfaction, and positively related to psychological distress.

It was hypothesized that work-family conflict will be negatively related to family satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported, and the correlation between the two

variables in the current study was  $r = -.44$ . These results suggest that the more work-family conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their family lives. This happens because participation in one domain makes it more difficult to participate in a second domain (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985); therefore, higher work demands may limit or prevent individuals from spending quality time with their families, which can lead to lower satisfaction with family life. This proves the argument that any work-related activities that interfere with family activities create conflict between work and family domains (Netemeyer et al., 1996). This conflict results in lower levels of satisfaction with family life amongst participants.

Findings from this study are consistent with previous research which reported negative correlations between work-family conflict and family satisfaction. Clark (2000) argued that work and family domains are the most important elements of everyone's life. Any competing demands of work and family life will cause conflict and negatively affect the wellbeing of workers (Frone, 2000; Clark, 2000). Several researchers (e.g. Frone, 2003; Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002; Allen et al., 2000; and Netemeyer et al., 1996) conducted studies on relationships between work-family conflict and family satisfaction, and found negative correlations between those two variables. These findings implied that employees experiencing higher levels of work-family conflict seemed to be less satisfied with their family lives. This was supported in this study.

This study proposed that work-family conflict will be negatively related to work satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported, and the correlation between the two

variables was  $r = -.28$ . These findings indicate that the more work-family conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their work. This suggests that work-related duties, amount of time spent at work, and strain produced by work demands and pressure had negative effects on respondents' degree of contentment with the kind of work they were doing in their jobs, overall satisfaction with their work, and commitment to their employers. The findings from the current study prove the argument that work-related activities competing with family activities create time-based conflict (Yang, 2005), and pressures and demands of work role conflicting with the demands of family role create strain-based conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000).

Results from the current study are consistent with past research conducted by Hill (2005), Allen et al. (2000) and Netemeyer et al. (1996) which reported negative relationships between work-family conflict and work satisfaction. In addition, Frye and Breugh (2004) found that employees experiencing higher levels of work-family conflict seem to be less satisfied with their jobs, which leads to lower levels of commitment towards their organisation. This was supported by the results of this study.

This study proposed that work-family conflict will be positively correlated with psychological distress. This hypothesis was supported, and the correlation between the two variables was  $r = .40$ . This result indicates that the more work-family conflict is experienced by individuals the more psychological distress will be observed. These findings suggest that participants who experienced higher levels of work-family conflict caused by higher degrees of work pressure and

demands, and longer time spent in employment, reported higher degrees of distress, concentration problems, sleeping problems, higher levels of unhappiness, strain, and lack of confidence.

The relationship between work-family conflict and psychological health outcomes such as distress and anxiety has been investigated by several researchers. Dikkers et al. (2007) showed a positive relationship between work-family conflict and distress. This is supported by the results of the current study. Research conducted by Grzywacz and Marks (2000) and Allen et al. (2000) showed positive correlations between work-family conflict and depression and anxiety. Hill (2005) and Frone et al. (1997) indicated positive correlations between work-family conflict and poor psychological health. Findings from the current study support previous research examining positive relationships between work-family conflict and poor psychological health.

### ***6.3. Causes of work-family conflict***

Some researchers indicate different causes of work-family conflict. Open-ended questions were not part of the main analyses; however they allowed the author to recognise the main causes of work-family conflict experienced by respondents. Interestingly, the causes of work-family conflict were different across different sectors. As previously stated the three main sectors in the sample population were financial sector (49%), retail sector (21%), and pharmacy sector (11%). The current study found that the main causes of work-family conflict across the financial sector were excessive workload caused by a reduced number of staff, and long working hours necessary to complete allocated tasks. These findings

support the argument of Allan et al. (2007) who reported that an excessive workload is strongly related to work-family conflict. These findings are also consistent with research conducted by Major et al. (2002) who reported positive relationships between the number of working hours and work-family conflict, resulting in decreased health and lower family functioning. Respondents working in the retail sector and the pharmacy sector reported work schedule inflexibility and long working hours as the main causes of work-family conflict. These findings are consistent with previous research conducted by Poelmans et al. (2005) and Clark (2000) who argue that long working hours, as well as work schedule inflexibility increase work-family conflict.

When respondents were asked what they thought their employers could do to improve their WLB, the majority suggested higher work schedule flexibility, more staff members, and less working hours and overtime. Some individuals indicated a preference for time off in lieu of working overtime, which suggests that employers could introduce more flexi-time initiatives and compressed working week initiatives, to improve employees WLB. However, a number of individuals indicated a preference for a pay increase for working longer hours, which would suggest that for those who indicated higher incomes, financial reward would compensate for the work-family conflict and poor WLB. Although this study omitted economic factors such as income in assessing levels of WLB and wellbeing, it should be noted that some research indicates a positive relationship between income and perception of wellbeing and a negative relationship between income and perception of stress (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001).

#### ***6.4. Availability and use of WLB benefits***

The current paper used several questions asking the participants about the availability and use of work-life balance benefits. Although these questions were not part of the main analyses, they allowed the author to gain more information about the level of availability of family-friendly initiatives across different employments in the private sector, and levels of use of these benefits by the sample population. Responses indicated that nearly 55% of employers did not have flexi-time initiatives available, and 20% of respondents stated that they did not have these options but needed them. In relation to compressed working weeks, over 74% of employers did not have these initiatives available, and 20% of respondents stated that they did not have these options but needed them. Respondents also indicated that over 38% of employers did not have part-time working initiatives available, and 13% of participants stated that they did not have these options but needed them.

A relatively low percentage (13%) of respondents who did not have but wanted part-time initiatives, when compared to 20% of those who did not have but wanted flexi-time and compressed working week initiatives, may suggest that some participants cannot afford to work fewer hours, as this could lead to lower incomes. Literature indicates that part-time work may create work-life imbalance amongst some individuals due to insufficient income (Warren, 2004). However, 20% of the sample population who did not have but needed flexi-time initiatives and 20% of the sample population who did not have but needed compressed working week initiatives suggests that employers can improve WLB amongst employees without affecting their income levels by providing such benefits.

In relation to childcare and eldercare support (both financial and non-financial), over 98% of employers did not have childcare support available, and 93% did not have eldercare support available. Over 30% of respondents needed childcare support but did not have it and over 30% needed eldercare support but did not have it. These findings suggest that employers could reduce work-family conflict by introducing childcare and eldercare support. It should be noted that the Irish population is ageing dramatically (CSO, 2013; Grady et al., 2008), and more employees may have to look after their elderly relatives, which will increase their duty of care for dependant elders, and lead to higher levels of work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985).

### ***6.5. Family-work conflict***

Family-work conflict was the second variable assessing individuals' WLB. Family-work conflict occurs when family activities interfere with work activities. Netemeyer et al. (1996, p.401) describe family-work conflict as "a form of inter role conflict in which general demands of, time devoted to, and strain created by the family interfere with performing work-related responsibilities". The present study proposed that family-work conflict will be negatively related to family satisfaction and work satisfaction, and positively related to psychological distress.

It was hypothesized that family-work conflict will be negatively correlated with family satisfaction. This hypothesis was supported, and the correlation between the two variables was  $r = -.20$ . These findings indicate that the more family-work conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their family



lives. This suggests that family activities that interfere with work-related activities create conflict, which results in lower levels of family satisfaction. Work and family literature shows limited research on interference between family activities with work-related activities, and its impact on family satisfaction. Hill (2005) conducted research amongst 1314 employees (634 female and 680 male) and found a negative relationship between family-work conflict and family satisfaction. The results of the present study are consistent with previous research conducted by Hill (2005).

The current study proposed that family-work conflict will be negatively correlated with work satisfaction. The correlation between the two variables was  $r = -.15$ , suggesting a small negative relationship, which would indicate that the more family-work conflict is experienced by individuals the less satisfied they are with their work. The findings from this study would support the argument of Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) who state that participation in the family domain makes it more difficult to participate in the work domain, suggesting that any family-related activities that interfere with work activities create conflict between those two domains, which results in lower levels of satisfaction with work. However the correlation in the present study was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), therefore this hypothesis was not supported.

Despite thorough research of work-family and family-work conflicts simultaneously, there seems to be insufficient research conducted exclusively on family-work conflict and its effects on individuals' wellbeing. The literature shows links between family-work conflict and lower work satisfaction (Frone,

2003; Williams & Allinger, 1994), family-work conflict and lower work performance (Hill, 2005), family-work conflict and higher job stress and turnover intentions (Netemeyer et al., 2005). However, due to a lack of statistical significance of the correlation between family-work conflict and work satisfaction, the findings from this study did not support the literature.

This study also proposed that family-work conflict will be positively correlated with psychological distress. Research conducted by Frone et al. (1992) reported a positive correlation between family-work conflict and depression. In fact, Frone et al. (1992) argued that the correlation between depression and family-work conflict is stronger over time than the correlation between depression and work-family conflict. Hill (2005) found a positive correlation between family-work conflict and individuals' stress. Literature also shows that family-work conflict is positively related to anxiety and substance disorders (Frone, 2000). However, in the current study the correlation between family-work conflict and psychological distress was very weak ( $r = .03$ ) and was not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). Therefore this hypothesis was not supported.

### ***6.6. Research question***

The aim of this study was to establish impacts of WLB and individuals' wellbeing. The sample population included individuals who were single and in relationships, with and without children, male and female. The reason behind choosing such sample was the argument of Grzywacz and Marks (2000) stating that single or childless employees also have significant family commitments towards their parents, siblings and other relatives. Respondents were employees

in the private sector, where 49% of the population was employed in the financial sector, 21% was employed in the retail sector and 11% was employed in the pharmacy sector. It was predicted that poor WLB will have a negative impact on individuals' wellbeing. WLB was measured by levels of work-family conflict and family-work conflict. Wellbeing was measured by levels of work satisfaction, family satisfaction and psychological distress.

The research question: "How work-life balance impacts the wellbeing of individuals employed in the private sector in Ireland?" was partially answered. The present study confirmed the existence of negative effects of poor WLB determined by high levels of work-family conflict on family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological health. In addition, this study confirmed the existence of negative effects of WLB determined by high levels of family-work conflict on family satisfaction. However, negative impacts of family-work conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health were not supported.

The present study shows negative impacts of poor WLB caused by higher levels of work-family conflict and family-work conflict on levels of family satisfaction amongst participants. Family satisfaction is an important aspect of individuals' wellbeing (Hill, 2005). Pressure caused by demands from work and from family negatively affected individuals' wellbeing, as work-related activities negatively impacted participation in family life, and family-related activities negatively impacted participation at work. These two conflicts had negative impacts on family satisfaction.

Hill (2005) points out that lower levels of employees' wellbeing caused by a lower degree of family satisfaction can influence employees' work performance. This occurs because family and work lives are the most important domains in everyone's life (Clark, 2000), and family and work satisfaction are positively related (Frone et al., 1992). Hence, lower levels of family satisfaction can lead to lower levels of work satisfaction, organisational commitment and productivity (Hill, 2005). These findings show that poor WLB caused by competing responsibilities in family and work domains have a negative impact on individuals' wellbeing, which was proven in the current study.

This study also confirmed negative effects of poor WLB caused by high work-family conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health. Many researchers indicate strong positive relationships between work satisfaction and wellbeing (Hill, 2005; Greenhaus et al., 2003). Work satisfaction in the current study referred to affective work satisfaction based on individuals' overall feelings about their job as a whole. The findings from this study indicated that work-related duties, amount of time spent at work, and strain produced by work demands and pressure had negative effects on respondents' satisfaction with work. Considering the argument of Frone et al. (1992) stating that family and work satisfaction are positively related, it could be suggested that lower levels of work satisfaction amongst participants can also lead to lower levels of family satisfaction, which will lead to lower general wellbeing.

Psychological distress was used as the third variable measuring wellbeing. Goldberg (1972) argues that psychological health is fundamental to people's

wellbeing and can be assessed by identifying symptoms of anxiety, depression, social dysfunction or distress. The literature indicates correlations between psychological health and ability to lead a fulfilling life by highlighting the relationship between work-family conflict and psychological distress (Allen et al., 2000; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Frone et al., 1992), and between work-family conflict and depression and anxiety (Allen et al., 2000). Findings from this study show that higher degrees of work pressure and demand, and longer time spent in employment leads to higher degrees of distress, concentration problems, sleeping problems, higher levels of unhappiness, lack of confidence, and strain amongst respondents. Therefore higher levels of distress lead to lower levels of overall wellbeing.

The interface between work and family lives suggests that responsibilities in work and family domains compete with each other in terms of limited time, psychological resources and physical energy, which leads to negative outcomes in both areas (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). The present study shows that mainly work-family conflict negatively impacted all three variables of wellbeing, namely: family satisfaction, work satisfaction and psychological health. In addition, this study shows that family-work conflict had a negative impact on family satisfaction. However, it could be argued that if family satisfaction and work satisfaction are positively related (Frone et al., 1992), lower levels of family satisfaction can lead to lower levels of work satisfaction and overall wellbeing. This suggests that family-work conflict could have a negative impact on overall wellbeing, as by having a negative impact on family satisfaction it could adversely influence other aspects of wellbeing, such as work satisfaction. This

negative impact of family-work conflict on work satisfaction was proposed by the author; however the findings of the current study did not support this proposition.

As previously mentioned this study did not confirm negative relationships between family-work conflict and work satisfaction, and family-work conflict and psychological health. Even though correlations between those variables would suggest a negative impact of higher family-work conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health, these correlations did not reach statistical significance, and these arguments could not be supported. Low correlation results between family-work conflict and work satisfaction and family-work conflict and psychological health could suggest that demands from family lives were more manageable or more flexible for the respondents than demands from work.

Work and family literature shows links between family-work conflict and lower work satisfaction (Frone, 2003; Williams & Allinger, 1994), lower work performance (Hill, 2005), and higher job stress and turnover intentions (Netemeyer et al., 2005). The literature also shows connections between family-work conflict and depression (Frone et al., 1992), anxiety and substance disorders (Frone, 2000). Nonetheless, research conducted exclusively on family-work conflict and its effects on individuals' wellbeing seems to be limited when compared to comprehensive research of work-family conflict and family-work conflict simultaneously.

Work and family literature suggests that work factors are main causes of work-family conflict, and family factors are main causes of family-work conflict

(Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone et al., 1992). Thorough research also supports the interrelationship between work stress and family stress (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone et al., 1997). The reason behind limited research on family-work conflict exclusively, and its impact on wellbeing could be the argument that work-family conflict occurs more frequently than family-work conflict (Frone, 2003). Nevertheless, a lower frequency of occurrence does not exclude the existence of relationships between family-work conflict and work satisfaction, and family-work conflict and psychological health. Therefore, further research on this topic is recommended.

### ***6.7. Practical implications***

The results of this study have several practical implications that should be beneficial to individuals, organisations, managers and business owners in terms of a deeper understanding of the significance of a healthy balance between work and family demands, and their effects on people's wellbeing and organisations' performance. From employees' perspective, a better understanding of the importance of balancing work and family demands should help in recognising the areas that negatively affect their wellbeing, and allow the addressing of these issues by seeking access to family-friendly initiatives that would improve their work and family satisfaction, and overall wellbeing. From organisations' point of view, this study should give employers better insights regarding connections between WLB and employees' wellbeing, and their impacts on employees' commitment, absenteeism, turnover, productivity and overall performance. This information should be useful to organisations in developing and implementing WLB policies.

The results of this study show negative relationships between poor WLB and individuals' wellbeing, in particular negative impacts of work-family conflict on levels of work satisfaction, family satisfaction and psychological health. Lower levels of work satisfaction can lead to employees' higher dissatisfaction with the employer, lower commitments and productivity. Lower family satisfaction can influence work performance (Hill, 2005). Distress can result in decreased productivity and higher absenteeism (Layous et al., 2011), higher staff turnover, and poorer work quality (Seligman, 2011).

Organisations, managers and business owners should take into consideration the consequences of poor WLB stated above, as they impact business productivity and performance. Some employers may be reluctant to implement family-friendly initiatives due to costs; however, over the long term, implementing family-friendly initiatives may reduce costs of sick leave, staff turnover and low productivity, and be more favourable to the business in terms of costs, productivity and performance. It should be noted that WLB has been recognised by employees and employers as an important factor in achieving optimum wellbeing and job performance (Clark, 2001).

Findings from this study should help organisations, managers and business owners to recognise the importance of employees' wellbeing and job satisfaction, as these factors are closely connected to staff motivation, commitment and retention, which impact organisations' productivity and overall performance. The current study showed that individuals' wellbeing benefits not only employees by



way of higher work satisfaction, family satisfaction and better psychological health, but it also benefits employers by decreased absenteeism and turnover, increased motivation, productivity and performance (Grady et al., 2008; Burke, 2000). As extensive hours at work and a lack of work schedule flexibility were identified as the main causes of work-family conflict, employers can decrease work-family conflict by introducing flexi-time, time off in lieu, and compressed working week initiatives to their employees. Organisations providing such benefits seem to understand the relationship between greater WLB and retention of a competent workforce, and its effect on organisational commitment and profitability (Ryan & Kossek, 2008).

The current study also identified demographic aspects impacting levels of WLB. It was shown that the Irish labour force has experienced a significant increase in female workers and two-income households (Grady et al., 2008; Hilliard, 2007), and that the Irish labour force is aging rapidly (Grady et al., 2008), which means that in the future organisations would require greater flexibility in working arrangements. These findings suggest that more employees may have childcare responsibilities and eldercare responsibilities, which can increase levels of work-family conflict (Frone et al., 1992; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In addition, this study recognised that in relation to childcare and eldercare support, over 98% of employers did not offer childcare support, and 93% did not offer eldercare support. Over 30% of respondents needed but did not have childcare support and 30% needed but did not have eldercare support. These findings suggest that employers could reduce work-family conflict by introducing childcare and eldercare support. Organisations, managers and business owners should take

those changing demographic characteristics into consideration in order to be able to develop and implement effective family-friendly initiatives, which would reduce work-family conflict, and improve WLB and the wellbeing of their employees.

### ***6.8. Limitations of the research***

The current study has several limitations. The first limitation was the return rate. Of the 190 questionnaires distributed, 114 were returned, resulting in a return rate of 60%. Considering the various categories of employers in the private sector chosen for this study to gather data, and the sample size, it should be noted that the findings from this study are relevant to the sample population, and may not be generalisable to the entire employment in private sector in Ireland. The findings may be relevant to similar occupations in similar businesses and organisations; however the results may not be relevant to the categories of employers not included in the sample. The size of the sample population (114 respondents) could also influence the statistical strength of this research. Therefore, future research on a larger sample population is recommended in order to increase the significance of the findings (Saunders et al., 2012). Also, future research should be conducted amongst different groups of employers using a bigger sample size, in order to obtain more information about different employment sectors in the private sector, which would lead to a better understanding of employment characteristics in the entire private sector in Ireland.

Another limitation was the sampling method. This study used a convenience sampling method, which means that individuals amongst those who were known

to the author and who were easy to be approached by the author were included in this research. Blumberg et al. (2008) and Bryman and Bell (2007) argue that even though convenience sampling is the easiest and the cheapest to conduct and can provide interesting data, it is the least reliable design due to a lack of ability to ensure precision, and due to limitations in relation to generalisability. As a non-probability sampling method was used for this research, there was no system in place ensuring that everyone in the population had an equal chance to be selected (McNabb, 2013). Therefore, characteristics of those who were not chosen for the sample remain unknown. Also, it should be noted that amongst the sample population chosen by the author, characteristics of the individuals who volunteered to take part in the research could differ from the characteristics of individuals who did not wish to take part in the research (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). In order to increase generalisability and the significance of the findings that are representative of the whole population, it is recommended for future research to use probability sampling (e.g. random sampling).

This research was based on data collected from a self-report questionnaire made up of multiple questions. The results of the data collected may have been limited due to responses bias (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008). Individuals who volunteered to take part in the research could have a stronger interest in the WLB topic than those who did not take part in the research. Also, an individual's circumstances while answering the questionnaire could have influenced the results. For example, if the questionnaire was completed at work, participants could have limited time allocated, and may not have read questions properly in order to fully understand what they were asked for. This could have lead to questions not being answered

correctly. While completing questionnaires at work, answers may have been influenced by the presence of participants' colleagues, managers or business owners. This could have prevented partakers from answering questions honestly, in particular questions asking about levels of work satisfaction, and how employers could improve WLB.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study makes some contributions to WLB studies regarding Irish employment. The study identified the existence of negative effects of poor WLB due to high levels of work-family conflict and family-work conflict on family satisfaction. This study also confirmed negative effects of poor WLB due to high levels of work-family conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health. It was found that demands and pressure from work and family domains have an adverse impact on family satisfaction. In addition, higher levels of work demands and longer time spent in employment led to lower levels of quality time spent with families and lower family satisfaction. Work-family conflict resulted in lower satisfaction with work and commitment towards employers, and higher degrees of distress, concentration problems, sleeping problems, unhappiness, and lack of confidence.

This study did not confirm negative relationships between family-work conflict and work satisfaction, and family-work conflict and psychological health. Even though correlations between those variables would suggest a negative impact of high family-work conflict on work satisfaction and psychological health, these correlations did not reach statistical significance, and these arguments could not be supported.

This research showed that the main causes of work-family conflicts were excessive working hours and a lack of work schedule flexibility. The research also showed that apart from an increasing female workforce and two-income

households, the Irish labour force is ageing. This could lead to increased demands for more flexible working arrangements for employees with eldercare and childcare responsibilities. It was recognised that employers can improve WLB by implementing family-friendly initiatives such as flexi-time, compressed working week, time off in lieu, childcare support and eldercare support.

Findings from the current study are important to both employees and employers in terms of a deeper understanding of WLB and its effects on people's wellbeing, which consequently affects organisations' productivity and performance.

## **8. Recommendations for further research**

As previously stated, work and family literature incorporates comprehensive research of work-family conflict and family-work conflict simultaneously, and their effects on individuals' wellbeing. There seems to be limited research conducted exclusively on family-work conflict and its effects on individuals' wellbeing. Work and family literature suggests that work factors are the main causes of work-family conflict, and family factors are main causes of family-work conflict (Grzywacz & Marks, 2000; Frone et al., 1992). The reason behind the limited research on the relationship between family-work conflict and wellbeing could be because work-family conflict occurs more frequently than family-work conflict (Frone, 2003). Nevertheless, a lower frequency of occurrence does not exclude the existence of relationships between family-work conflict and work satisfaction and family-work conflict and psychological health. Therefore further research on this topic is recommended.

It was predicted in the current study that family-work conflict will have a negative relationship with work satisfaction. However the interaction between family-work conflict and work satisfaction was weak and did not reach statistical significance. It was also predicted that family-work conflict will have a positive relationship with psychological distress. The interaction between those two variables was also very weak and did not reach statistical significance. Future research is necessary to establish when and how family-work conflict impacts individuals' wellbeing in terms of work satisfaction and psychological health. Alternative measures may be considered in order to establish relationships

between family-work conflict and work satisfaction, and family-work conflict and psychological health. As the current study used objective, quantitative measures, it is recommended that subjective, qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews are used in future research in this area.

The current study used deductive research approaches focusing on using data to test theory. Quantitative research methods were used in order to establish a relationship between WLB and the wellbeing of individuals. Four out of six hypotheses developed for this study were supported. The results from the correlations were consistent with past research. In order to gain more nuanced results that were not obtained in the quantitative research methods used in this study; more subjective, qualitative research methods such as in-depth interviews are recommended for future research.

The current research focused on WLB where the interference between work and family domains was measured using work-family conflict and family-work conflict. Work and family literature shows that enhancement or positive spillover between work and family domains also plays an important role on individuals WLB and wellbeing. As previously stated in this paper Frone (2003) believes that four aspects should be used in order to measure WLB. They are: (a) work-family conflict, (b) family-work conflict, (c) work-family enhancement, and (d) family-work enhancement. As these components have bi-directional effects on work and family domains, participation in the work role may interfere or enhance the performance in the family role, and vice versa, participation in the family role may interfere or enhance performance in the work role (Frone, 2003). Research



conducted by Grzywacz and Marks (2000) referred to spill-over theory, where the authors also found that negative spillover from work to family, negative spillover from family to work, positive spillover from family to work and positive spillover from work to family are four distinct forms of work-family experience. Thus, it is recommended for future research to include aspects of interference as well as enhancement between work and family domains, in order to measure WLB and its impact on wellbeing amongst individuals.

Grady et al. (2008, p.3) argue that the term 'work-life balance' is more comprehensive and includes "family, community, recreation and personal time". The current study focused on individuals' families and workplaces only, and excluded aspects of recreation, communities and society. Future research should use WLB in its broader sense, where aspects of community membership and leisure are included.

Wellbeing in the current study referred to subjective, emotional wellbeing which involved three components of happiness: (a) life satisfaction, (b) the presence of positive mood, and (c) the absence of a negative mood (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Economic factors such as individual's income were omitted. Work and family literature indicates a positive relationship between income and perceptions of wellbeing, and a negative relationship between income and perceptions of stress (Jacobs & Gerson, 2001). Thus, economic factors such as individuals' income should be included in future research.

As previously mentioned, one of the limitations of this study was the size of the sample population. A convenience sampling method was used, which means that individuals who were known to the author and who were easy to be approached by the author were included in this research. The sample population consisted of 114 respondents amongst different categories of employment in the private sector. Future research on a larger sample population is recommended in order to increase the significance of the findings (Saunders et al., 2012). Also, probability sampling, such as random sampling, should be used to increase generalisability and the significance of the findings that are representative of the whole population. This means that future research conducted amongst different groups of employers using a bigger sample size will allow the obtaining of more information about different employment sectors in the private sector, which would lead to a better understanding of employment characteristics in the entire private sector in Ireland.

Finally, this research was conducted amongst individuals employed in the private sector only, omitting individuals who are self-employed and employees in the public sector. In order to gain a better understanding of employment characteristics across the whole working population in Ireland, it is recommended to conduct similar research amongst the self-employed and employees in the public sector. Assessing levels of work-family conflict and family-work conflict amongst individuals who are self-employed and who are employed in the private sector would assist the recognition of the impact of WLB on the wellbeing of the working population of Ireland as a whole, and the subsequent consequences on individuals and businesses performance.

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## **Appendix**

The information sheet and WLB questionnaire

# How work-life balance affects wellbeing of employees in the private sector

Dear participant,

I am a postgraduate student at the National College of Ireland. This survey is part of my Masters of Business Administration Degree. The survey focuses on the impacts of work-life balance on the wellbeing of people working in the private sector in Ireland. This includes individuals who are married and single, with and without children, female and male.

Work- life balance is understood as your levels of satisfaction with your work-life and family-life, and will be measured using a family-work conflict scale and a work-family conflict scale. In this questionnaire family life means life outside your work.

Wellbeing is understood as happiness, and will be measured using a family satisfaction scale, a work satisfaction scale and a psychological health scale.

This questionnaire also contains a few demographic questions and questions about the availability and use of work-life balance initiatives at your workplace.

The full questionnaire should take approximately fifteen minutes to complete. Your participation is voluntary and entirely confidential. No personal data will be collected. The findings of the research will be included in my final thesis. The results of this research will be provided to you on request.

If you have any queries regarding this survey please contact me on:

Mobile: 0857198266

Email: [mkluczyk77@gmail.com](mailto:mkluczyk77@gmail.com)

Thank you very much for your participation

Malgorzata Kluczyk

## **Availability of work-life balance benefits at your workplace**

Using the 1-4 scale please indicate your agreement with each item by ticking the appropriate circle

### **1. Flexitime - e.g. part-time work, rostered hours, night/day shifts**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

### **2. Compressed work week - e.g. working approx 40 hours in fewer than 5 days**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

### **3. Telecommuting - e.g. having the flexibility to work from home using a computer**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

### **4. Part-time work - e.g. working fewer hours than a full-time worker**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

### **5. On-site child-care center - e.g. child-care available at the location of the company**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

### **6. Subsidised local child-care - e.g. the company's contribution to the needed child-care costs**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

### **7. Child-care information/referral services - e.g. when the company offers assistance in locating a child-care when needed**

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed



## 8. Paid maternity leave / paternity leave

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

## 9. Elder care - e.g. the company provides financial support for elder care

1. Available +  
Used

2. Available + Not  
used

3. Not available + But  
needed

4. Not available + Not  
needed

# Family-Work Conflict

Using the 1-7 scale, please indicate your agreement with each item by ticking the appropriate circle

### 1. The demands of my family or spouse/ partner interfere with work-related activities

1. Strongly  
disagree

2. Disagree

3. Slightly  
disagree

4. Neither agree  
nor disagree

5. Slightly  
agree

6. Agree

7. Strongly  
agree

### 2. I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home

1. Strongly  
disagree

2. Disagree

3. Slightly  
disagree

4. Neither agree  
nor disagree

5. Slightly  
agree

6. Agree

7. Strongly  
agree

### 3. Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family or spouse/partner

1. Strongly  
disagree

2. Disagree

3. Slightly  
disagree

4. Neither agree  
nor disagree

5. Slightly  
agree

6. Agree

7. Strongly  
agree

### 4. My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime

1. Strongly  
disagree

2. Disagree

3. Slightly  
disagree

4. Neither agree  
nor disagree

5. Slightly  
agree

6. Agree

7. Strongly  
agree

### 5. Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties

1. Strongly  
disagree

2. Disagree

3. Slightly  
disagree

4. Neither agree  
nor disagree

5. Slightly  
agree

6. Agree

7. Strongly  
agree

## Work-Family Conflict

### 1. The demands of my work interfere with my home and family life

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 2. The amount of time my job takes up makes it difficult to fulfil my family responsibilities

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 3. Things I want to do at home do not get done because of the demands my job puts on me

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 4. My job produces strain that makes it difficult to fulfil family duties

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 5. Due to work-related duties, I have to make changes to my plans for family activities

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

## Family Satisfaction

### 1. In most ways my family-life is close to my ideal

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 2. The conditions of my family-life are excellent

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 3. I am satisfied with my family life

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 4. So far I have got the important things I want in my family-life

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 5. If I could live my family-life over, I would change almost nothing

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

## Work Satisfaction

### 1. Generally speaking, I am very happy with my work

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 2. I frequently think of leaving this job

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

### 3. I am generally satisfied with the kind of work I do in my job

1. Strongly disagree      2. Disagree      3. Slightly disagree      4. Neither agree nor disagree      5. Slightly agree      6. Agree      7. Strongly agree

## Psychological Health

Using the 1-4 scale please indicate your agreement with each item by ticking the appropriate circle

**Have you recently: 1. been able to concentrate on what you are doing?**

1. Better than usual

2. Same as usual

3. Worse than usual

4. Much worse than usual

**2. lost much sleep over worry?**

1. Not at all

2. No more than usual

3. Rather more than usual

4. Much more than usual

**3. felt you are playing a useful part in things?**

1. More so than usual

2. Same as usual

3. Less so than usual

4. Much less than usual

**4. felt capable of making decisions about things?**

1. More so than usual

2. Same as usual

3. Less so than usual

4. Much less than usual

**5. felt constantly under strain?**

1. Not at all

2. No more than usual

3. Rather more than usual

4. Much more than usual

**6. felt you couldn't overcome your difficulties?**

1. Not at all

2. No more than usual

3. Rather more than usual

4. Much more than usual

**7. been able to enjoy your normal day-to-day activities?**

1. More so than usual

2. Same as usual

3. Less so than usual

4. Much less than usual

**8. been able to face up to your problems?**

1. More so than usual

2. Same as usual

3. Less so than usual

4. Much less than usual

**9. been feeling unhappy or depressed?**

1. Not at all    2. No more than usual    3. Rather more than usual    4. Much more than usual

**10. been losing confidence in yourself?**

1. Not at all    2. No more than usual    3. Rather more than usual    4. Much more than usual

**11. been thinking of yourself as a worthless person?**

1. Not at all    2. No more than usual    3. Rather more than usual    4. Much more than usual

**12. been feeling reasonably happy, all things considered?**

1. More so than usual    2. Same as usual    3. Less so than usual    4. Much less than usual

## **Demographic questions**

Please tick the appropriate box

**1. Gender**

Male

Female

**2. Age**

18 – 25

26 – 35

36 – 45

46 – 55

56 – 65

66 +

**3. Marital Status**

Single

Married/Cohabiting

Separated/Divorced

Widowed

**4. Do you have children?**

Yes

No

**If yes, how many children do you have?**

Please write number

**If yes, what are the ages of all of your children?**

Please write in the box below

**If yes, what are the ages of the children who live with you?**

Please write in the box below

**5. Do you look after any elderly relatives?**

Yes

No

**6. Are you employed?**

Full-time

Part-time

**7. Approximate number of hours PER WEEK spent in paid employment**

Please write in the box below

**8. What sector do you work in?**

Please write in the box below

**9. What is your current role in your job?**

Please write in the box below

**10. How long have you been with your employer?**

Please write in the box below

## **Your comments (optional)**

**1. How would you summarise your work-life balance?**

Please write in the box below

**2. What do you think your employer could do to improve your work-life balance?**

Please write in the box below

**3. Any other comments?**

Please write in the box below

***Thank you for your participation***